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PARSON JIM, KING OF THE COWBOYS; Or, THE GENTLE SHEPHERD'S BIG "CLEAN OUT."

A STORY OF THE COLORADO CATTLE TRAIL.

BY CAPTAIN FREDERICK WHITTAKER.

AUTHOR OF "NEMO, KING OF THE TRAMPS," "RED RUDIGER," "THE RUSSIAN SPY," "THE RED RAJAH," "THE IRISH CAPTAIN," "THE MAN IN RED," "DEATH'S HEAD CUIRASSIERS," "PHANTOM KNIGHTS," ETC., ETC.



"COWARD, KILL ME! FOR IF YOU DON'T, I'LL KILL YOU SOME DAY."

Parson Jim, King of the Cowboys;

OR,
The Gentle Shepherd's Big "Clean Out."

A Story of the Colorado Cattle Trail.

BY CAPT. FREDERICK WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "ONE EYE, THE CANNONEER," "MAN
IN RED," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MULEVILLE.

THE enterprising and progressive town of Muleville is too well known to the inhabitants of the great West to need location on the map by the aid of prosaic latitude and longitude, and too much noted for remarkable men, women and children to require eulogy at the hands of the present writer.

Every cowboy who has ever passed through Muleville on his return from the annual drive unites in praising it as "the liveliest town on the trail," and the inhabitants proudly point to the fact that, while only ten years old, Muleville has the most flourishing cemetery of any town in southern Colorado, and has never yet had the misfortune to bury any man who did not "die with his boots on."

As the late Justice Boanerges Brown—better known to the boys as "Old Bo Brown"—remarked, in his memorable speech on the Fourth of July, 1878, "It ain't for me, feller-citizens, to praise Muleville, bein' as one might say, born and suckled under the shadder of its moun'tings; riz to manhood, bone and sinner on its limestun water and sage brush. We that knows Muleville knows that its ekal don't stand on the speer of this here globe of oun, and them as don't know Muleville don't know nothen. (*Wild cheers.*) Standin' as she do with her head a-p'intin' to the settin' sun, her heels threatenin' death and broken bones to the tenderfoots of the sordid and tax-ridden East, that comes arter her to pluck the golden hairs from her shinin' tail, and gets slung to the four winds of heaven for their pains; Muleville, like the proud creeter she's named arter, scorns to be driv', but follers the bell mare all the time. Our gallant citizens, stern as a quartz rock to the face of a stranger from the East, ready to lay down their lives any time on a p'int of honor at poker, yet melts like wax and taller combined under the warm smile of beauty, and Muleville follers the bell mare all the time."

This poetical allusion to the fondness of the Mulevillians for the gentler sex called forth such yells of applause that the judge was compelled to pause in his speech to obtain further hearing, and that pause was fatal to the rest of his "greatest effort" as far as delivery was concerned, though it afterward appeared in the columns of the "Muleville Pioneer" in full, so that every one might read it for himself. As a matter of fact, the rest of it was never delivered; for, just as the judge paused, a voice in the rear of the crowd cried:

"Get off my toe, you dodrotted, splayfooted skunk, you! Do you think a gentleman—?"

"Who are you callin' a splayfooted skunk, you squint-eyed gopher, you?" roared a second voice; and in less than ten seconds pistol-shots were cracking, bullets whistling, knives flashing, and the Honorable Bo Brown fell flat on his face on the platform, with the crowd scattering in all directions, and a free fight of the liveliest nature going on, not fifty feet away.

To be sure, the little difficulty was soon over, and only resulted in three actual "stiffs," as the Mulevillians styled corpses, but the citizens of the place had no more relish for speechifying, and took their patriotic fervor out, for the rest of their holiday, in the usual libations of sour-mash whisky, of which each citizen put at least one quart under his belt, before sunset sent them all indoors to fight musketees.

Such was Muleville in the year 1878, and we are proud to say that its "liveliness" has not decreased since that time. There is always plenty of excitement in Muleville—enough to keep the citizens thin as rails. The only fat man in the town in 1878 was the Hon. Bo Brown, who was so well known to be a consummate coward that no one troubled themselves to quarrel with him, and who was quite a pet in Muleville on account of his phenomenal oratorical powers. It was in that same year of grace 1878, just after the great fall cattle drive, that a pale young man, small and slender; with hollow chest, bent back, thin white hands, and feet as small as those of a Spanish lady, entered the town of Muleville on the stage from Bullwhacker's Creek and descended from the aforesaid stage at the door of the Metropolitan Hotel, Joab Appleby, proprietor.

His thin face and the slight cough which had troubled him so much on the dusty road from Bullwhacker's Creek, sufficiently announced that he was an invalid, come West for his health in all likelihood; but it was equally plain that he was both surprised and dismayed at what he

saw before him at Muleville. If this was the case with the poor young traveler, who hardly looked more than twenty-three or four years of age, it must be admitted that he, on his part, did not please the Mulevillians. Accustomed as they were to see none but big, powerful, raw-boned men and buxom women, the effeminate look of the little stranger seemed to be resented as a personal affront, and Mr. Appleby—better known as "Applejack Joe,"—did not deign to remove his boots from the top of the bar as the young man slowly entered the hotel, and stood looking nervously round him, as if uncertain what to do. "Applejack" favored him with a sidelong glance that ranged from his crown to his toes, and shot a brown stream of tobacco juice not very far from the strang'r's boots, out of the corner of his own mouth, but concluded no audible remark.

He saw in the stranger something he had never seen in Muleville before, a man without the strength of a man, or the power of a man to keep himself from insult. The fact that his face was perfectly beautiful, with delicate regular features, soft blue eyes and bright, wavy, fair hair that fell nearly to his coat collar, had no effect other than irritation on the mind of Joab. The delicate grace of the stranger's figure passed him without approval, because, with it all, was no appearance of strength. The young man was what Joab, in his heart called a "mammy's brat," and he only grunted in answer to the stranger's glance of inquiry, and observed:

"Well, what is it?"

"Is this the Metropolitan Hotel, sir?" asked the young man, timidly.

"In course it is. Hain't ye got no eyes, ye darned tenderfooted babbie? Say, what in thunder and blazes brought you out here, ye darnation fule?"

The stranger started, and his pale face flushed, while the tears came to his eyes as he answered the uncivil query:

"God knows I couldn't help it, my friend, but the doctors ordered me to come out here to save my life."

Joab uttered a tremendous oath, let down his feet with a bang, and stood up before the stranger, showing a hundred and ninety pounds of big bones and muscular flesh as he roared out:

"WHAT! SAY THAT AG'IN!"

His menacing aspect—for he wore a revolver and bowie-knife, and scowled over his bushy brown beard like a stage pirate—awed the young stranger so that he faltered:

"For God's sake, what have I said? I didn't mean any offense, I assure you, sir. I only told you that the doctors ordered me to Colorado to save my life."

Joab Appleby gave a huge stamp, and burst out yelling with laughter, roaring so loud that quite a little crowd of loafers came into the bar-room, and one of them asked:

"What in blazes is the joke, Applejack? What ye laffin' at?"

Joab could not answer at first; but at last he ejaculated, holding his sides:

"Oh, good Lordy, that's too much! Whar's Bo Brown? Hyar's a galoot—Oh! persimmons and hard cider! that's too much. Whar's Jedge Brown?"

And he roared out laughing again, unable to explain the cause of his hilarity, while the hangers-on stared at the embarrassed young man as if he had been some strange species of wild beast. They knew that Joab was laughing at the young "tenderfoot," and were quite willing to join in if they only knew the exact point. So, pending an explanation, they stared scornfully on general principles, and hitched up their pistol-belts to overawe the stranger still more.

And in the midst of all this vague hilarity "Jedge" Brown rolled in, a perfect mountain of flesh, and chuckled out:

"Waal, boys, what's the racket? Got a tenderfoot to roast? Who is he?"

Then Joab Appleby brought down his big hand on the harmless little stranger's shoulder, wheeled him round like a baby, and cried out:

"Look a-here, jedge; look a-here, boys! Here's a galoot! Durned if he didn't tell me, jest now, that he come to Muleville to save his life! Oh! ho—ho—ho! Save his life, by gosh! Haw—haw—haw!"

And, to the amazement of the young man, the joke seemed to be thought so good that every loafer in the bar-room began to yell louder than his neighbor, and a wild war-dance took place round the stranger, which was only closed by Judge Brown roaring in a voice of thunder:

"Order, gents, order! Leave him to me. I'll examine him. Order in the court. We'll save his life, by gosh!"

The words produced an immediate silence in the bar-room. The dance ceased, the loafers gathered in a circle round the judge and the little stranger; Joab Appleby took his position behind the bar, while every man in the room fixed a stony glare on the unhappy young man, who, on his part, seemed too utterly bewildered and disconcerted at his singular and inhospitable reception to say a word for himself.

Then Judge Brown cleared his throat, and observed:

"Ahem! Stranger, you are jest come in, I reckon. Whar from? Don't be skeered. I'm jedge of this hyar caounty, and it's my biz to ax questions of strangers. Who air ye? What's yer name? Whar do ye come from? How much money hev ye got? Does yer mammy know ye're out? Answer quick, and remember, ef ye lie, we hang hoss-thieves over the next tree. Come, spit her out."

At this singular address the young man faltered out:

"For Heaven's sake what do you mean? I'm a stranger here—"

"That's easy seen," was the dry reply.

"What's yer name, stranger?"

"James Arthur," was the answer.

"Jim Arthur, hey?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. You look about big enough to fight 'skeeters. What do you do for a livin', Jimmy?"

"I was a student of divinity at the theological seminary," began the young man, when the judge interrupted.

"A what? A parson? Young man, do you know we shoot parsons on sight in this country?"

"No, sir, I didn't. Why?"

"Cause they hold opinions insultin' to this free and enlightened community of Muleville," thundered the judge, breaking into a stump speech to the crowd. "Who air we, citizens, to be bulldozed and trampled on by these snivelin' preachers, tellin' us how we're a-goin' into a pit of fiery destruction, jest because we enjoy the privileges of a free man on his own soil, to drink as much good whisky as he likes and shoot his man if he gets a chance? And here comes a feller to tell us we're all miserable sinners, goin' to git burned up—Say," he went on, turning suddenly round on the young man with a savage scowl, "what do you mean by comin' here to preach against us? Hey?"

"I'm sure I'd no such intentions," faltered the young fellow, looking round him at the scowling faces. "I'm not a preacher at all, gentlemen, and I hardly think I ever shall be, however I might wish to be. My health has broken down under hard study, and I was sent to Colorado by the doctors as my only chance to escape disease of the lungs. I was told that if I could get on a ranch to drive cattle, the free open air life might restore me, and that's why I came here. That's all."

Judge Brown allowed him to speak, and then winked solemnly at the crowd, as he responded:

"So you've come here to drive cattle, have you, Jimmy, my boy?"

"If I can get a chance," said young Arthur, innocently.

"Kin you shoot, Jimmy, my boy?" the judge resumed paternally. "Kin you hit a 'skeeter's eye, plum center, at ten rod distance?"

"No, sir," answered Arthur; "is it quite necessary that one should learn to shoot, to be competent to drive cattle?"

The judge allowed a grim smile to cross his broad expanse of jowl as he answered sarcastically:

"Air it necessary? Yes it be. How'n thunders a galoot goin' to live on the cattle trail 'thout his weepins? Hain't you got none?"

He eyed the young man from head to foot as he spoke, but it was with perfect innocence that Arthur said:

"Why no. I never fired a pistol in my life. I never had occasion to do so. I came here, as I told you before, to save my life if I can."

The words produced another yell of laughter. The idea of any sane man coming to Muleville to preserve his life was too rich for the crowd to contain themselves, and the judge could not keep his own face till he had completed his answer:

"So you come to Muleville to save your life, did yer? Jimmy, my boy, do you know there air a bigger berrin' ground in Muleville than in any place of the size in the hull wild West. Men in Muleville don't vally their lives more'n a cent, and the best thing you kin do is to get right straight outer Muleville and go fur a sheep ranch, ef you want to save your life. Tain't worth ten days hyar. Now then, how much money hev ye got 'bout ye?"

All the loafers pricked up their ears at this, but, somewhat to their surprise the little "tenderfoot" drew himself up and replied:

"I don't see, sir, that I am called on to answer that question."

"You ain't, ain't you?" thundered the judge, with a ferocious scowl, while the loafers began to grin to each other and watch the sequel with interest, for every one knew the judge to be a hulking coward, and yet the disproportion in size between him and the little stranger was so great that it was obvious the judge was going to try bullying him.

"You ain't, ain't you? We'll see about that," he roared, swelling and fuming. "Do you know the rule in Muleville, stranger? Say!"

"I don't," returned the other, his face flushing slightly, "unless it be to insult and plunder every sick man that happens to be decoyed on your way. My money, such little as I have, is my own, and I don't answer questions as to its

amount to any one. You call yourself a judge. Then I appeal to you for protection. Which is the landlord of this house?"

He turned on Appleby.

"You are the landlord. Is this the way you receive your guests when they come in, tired and sick? Have I come into a town of American citizens, or are you all savages and cut-throats? If you are, here I am. I am sick and unarmed, unable to defend myself, and you've treated me in a brutal and cowardly manner, all of you. Now, I demand to be let alone. Landlord, I want a room and some dinner. I'm tired and faint. I demand that you keep this bullying ruffian from further insult. It's an outrage."

He broke down in a fit of coughing, and even the most hardened ruffian in the room looked ashamed of his brutality at the sight of the evident helpless weakness of the poor little stranger. Joab Appleby nodded to the rest and said:

"By gosh! he's right, boys. 'Tain't the thing to sass a sick man. Here, young feller, come with me. I'll give you a room and some grub, but by gosh you ain't fit fur Muleville."

"No, sirree, that obstropolous little varmint don't git off that way," roared the voice of Judge Brown. "You know the rule of Muleville, Applejack. It's treat or fight. The stranger's got to treat this crowd or fight me, by gosh!"

The proposal suited the crowd; even Joab could not resist the argument.

"It's true what the jedge says," he remarked apologetically to Arthur. "It air the rule. Strangers has to treat in Muleville. Better do it, Jimmy."

But, still more to the surprise of the roomful of men, the little man, with his fair, boyish face, black clerical coat and white necktie, only shook his head and retorted:

"It is an unjust rule, an inhospitable rule, and I shall not submit to it. I don't drink spirits myself, and I will not ask any one else to do what I think wrong. Show me to my room, landlord. *I will not treat.*"

There was a murmur, not altogether unfavorable to the stranger, in the room; but Judge Brown, thinking it safe to bully such a small man, shouted out:

"Then if you don't treat, by gosh, you will fight me. Come, which is it?"

Then the little stranger turned round, and looked right into the eye of the big man, answering:

"I'm sick, as you see, and it has always been against my principles to fight, except to save my life. But I warn you that if you persist in forcing this quarrel on me, against my will, I shall fight to the last, and if once you rouse in me the devil which I have hitherto kept down by prayer and self-control, it will be the worse for you. You are a coward, and I know it. Come on, if you dare."

He stood there, so small and frail that his words seemed a mockery, yet there was a blaze in his blue eye, an expression on his face that they had not noticed before, and Joab Appleby roared out approvingly:

"Divinity Jim, by gosh, you've got the grit of a man arter all, if ye only had a body to back it. Now, jedge, sail in. I'll bet on Divinity Jim, if he ain't no bigger'n a gopher."

Then the loafers in the bar-room began to cheer, as they saw the mountainous fat of "Jedge" Brown and the puny proportions of the little stranger, and the cries arose:

"Make 'em fight it out."

"I'll bet on 'Skeeter Jimmy."

"Go it, jedge: give him Jesse."

"Sail in, parson; the jedge ain't wuth shucks to fight."

"Sit on him, jedge. Squash him flat."

And in the midst of these cries the little man stood eying his huge enemy like a game bantam cock, ready to fight a huge Shanghai, and the cheers and laughter became uproarious as every one saw that the judge had turned pale and was shaking in his fat, while the little man looked as fierce as ever.

Nearly a minute they stood thus, and then the judge held out his hand to the little man, saying in a lordly way:

"I don't want to hurt ye. Come and take a drink. My field of battle is in the forum, and my only weapons my brain and tongue."

The little man turned away with a curl of his lip.

"Your brain! You don't look as if you had much to spare. I'll not drink with you. Do you understand?"

"Hold on, hold on," observed Joab Appleby, gravely. "Don't go too fur, Jimmy. Ye can't break that rule nowhar. Ef ye won't fight, ye must drink. I can't uphold ye in no sich foolishness. The jedge did the c'rect thing."

"Ay, ay, no hard feelin's," said one of the hangers-on. "The jedge says drink, and drink it is."

"Then drink," returned Arthur in the same quiet but firm way. "I shall not drink with that man, and if he tries to bully me, I shall defend myself as well as I can."

"And that ain't sayin' much," said Appleby with a grin. "Come, gents, the jedge treats. What is it?"

The thirsty gang immediately came up to the bar in a crowd, and the little stranger, unnoticed for awhile, went and sat wearily down on a hard wooden chair in the corner of the bar-room, with his shabby black valise on the ground beside him, waiting the landlord's convenience to give him a room.

Poor boy! he felt very weary and wretched that day, fresh from the comforts of home, plunged into the midst of what was to him veritable savagery.

He heard nothing round him but the coarse jest, the rude oath; saw only hulking, coarsely dressed men, with pistols on their hips, and saw in the bibulous "jedge" the only man in the place who made any pretensions to education.

And what an education to be sure, when this vulgar stump orator was its best representative.

He sat there, buried in bitter and desponding thoughts, impatient at his own weakness, indignant at the tyranny practiced on him as a stranger, yet unable to resent it on account of his physical insignificance, with the spirit of a hero boiling up in his bosom and the frame of a weakling boy to back it.

"Better die than live on here to be despised by every one," he said to himself despondently. "I might better die at once."

He was roused from his reverie by the sound of wild yells and pistol-shots in the streets, and in a moment a great commotion rose up in the bar-room.

Joab Appleby jumped out and shouted excitedly:

"The cowboys are coming! Git to hidin'. Thar on a tear."

The warning seemed to be perfectly well understood by all but young Arthur, who remained sitting in his chair. The judge turned pale, and the whole crowd rushed wildly for the back yard where they disappeared into a cellar, leaving the stranger all alone, with the sound of horses coming near at full gallop.

CHAPTER II.

COWBOYS ON A TEAR.

THE innocent young "tenderfoot," sitting back in his wooden rocker, pale and weak, saw through the open window a great cloud of dust, from which flashed out pistol-shots. The most ferocious yells were to be heard, and he truly thought the place was about to be attacked by Indians, while he was too much unmanned by palpitation of the heart, owing to nervous excitement, to rise and flee. Besides this he knew he was too weak to flee far, and could only wait passively.

On came the cloud of dust, and every now and then a bullet whistled by the window, accompanied by a wild yell, as some inhabitant of the place scuttled across the road to get to some safer locality.

Then, up to the door of the Metropolitan Hotel dashed a score of mounted men, on small, wiry horses, covered with foam and dust, and James Arthur, for the first time in his life, saw that spectacle so familiar to the citizens of Muleville—"cowboys on a tear."

Fine, dashing, picturesque fellows were they all, tall and muscular, thin and long-limbed, with bushy beards and long hair flowing over their shoulders. They wore broad hats, either of the Mexican style, stiff and glazed, with gold cords and tassels bound round them, or the wide felt prairie hat, looped up and flapping. Their attire was in all cases of black, brown or blue velveteen, with broad silver dollars for buttons, wide trowsers, slashed with silver lace, and huge Mexican spurs. All wore red silk sashes, garnished with knives and pistols, and every man had a cruel black whip slung from his wrist, about six feet long, shaped like a snake. But what impressed the nervous stranger most was the fact that these men seemed all crazy with excitement or drink, and were firing recklessly all round them into the windows of the houses, as if careless what damage they did, which was the fact.

They drew up with a great clatter and yelling in front of the hotel, leaped off their horses, and came rushing in, still hooting.

"Applejack Joe! Where's Joe? Bring him out, boys!" shouted a giant with a forest of black hair round his face. "Drink him dry and bu'st every bar'l on him, the darned ga-

"Hooray for the Blossom Ranch," yelled another man, firing his pistol into the mirror over the bar. "We're the boys that's cleaned out Muleville. Sock it to the winders! Smash the cheers! Let's have fun while we're at it, boys."

The speech was the sequel for a general fusillade, as the wild cowboys fired all round them with yells of laughter, and little James Arthur, lying back in the rocker, saw himself surrounded by what he deemed a mob of maniacs, who pretended not to notice him and sent the bullets whistling past his ears, splintering the back of his chair close to his head, while he closed his eyes and sat still, expecting every moment to be his last.

Then the black-bearded giant came up to him and pretended to see him for the first time, shouting:

"Say, boys, what is it? Oh, huckleberries

and sugar, what is it? Look at the white choker! By gosh, if it ain't a parson! Bill Travers, I'll bet you five dollars I kin shoot the buttons off the parson's coat as he sets there."

"Bet ye five ye don't do it 'thout drawin' blood," shouted back Bill, the other giant. "Set still parson. Don't be skeered. Tom Johnson can't do it, and I'll bet on it."

And as they spoke, the black-bearded ruffian drew to one side, while the cowboys made a ring, and deliberately pointed his pistol to execute his fantastic threat. The young man in the chair turned his head. His face was very pale, and his blue eyes were blazing as he said:

"Don't you see I'm sick and unarmed, you cowardly brute? Isn't there a brave man in all your gang of bullies? I'm one, and you're twenty. Shoot away. Kill me if you want to, but I warn you of one thing. If ever I get well again, I'll make you repent this."

He actually showed not a trace of fear, this frail youth, who broke down coughing with his last words, and Bill Travers called out:

"By gosh, the parson's grit! Let him alone, boys. Where's Applejack Joe? Let's clean him out."

He seemed to be a good-natured giant with all his reckless devilry; but Tom Johnson was a man of different stamp. He had cruel black eyes, set close together, and they glittered with savage fire as he growled:

"No, by gosh, Bill, not yet. That little sucker call me a cowardly brute, and he's got to pay fur it. Hyar, you, gawl darn your skin, what d'ye mean by that? Hey?"

As he spoke he strode up to the chair in which sat the frail stranger, and brought down his broad hand with a slap on the other's shoulder. No sooner was it done than, with a quickness that amazed every one, the little man writhed away out of his grasp, dealt him a blow in the face that stung him to fury, and then stood in the attitude of a boxer in the middle of the room crying:

"Come on. I'm not afraid of you."

For one moment the huge cowboy stood flabbergasted at the impudence of his small antagonist: the next his face assumed the expression of a demon, and he rushed at the little man, who slipped to one side, got in a second blow that enraged his foe still more, and in two seconds more was caught up and dashed on the floor like a child, breath and sense nearly knocked out of him.

Then Tom Johnson caught his puny foe up by the collar, and roared out:

"You ain't afraid, ain't you? By gosh, I'll make you beg afore I've done, you p'izen little varmint. D'ye beg my pardon, say?"

As he spoke he whirled back the long "quirt" or bull-whip he had slung to his wrist, and James Arthur saw the devil in his eye, while the other cowboys stood stonily round, with folded arms.

"D'ye beg, say?" roared Tom Johnson, and the exhausted youth panted out:

"Coward, kill me! For if you don't, I'll kill you some day."

"Crack!"

The terrible weapon that cuts through a bull's tough hide, fell on the frail form of the stranger, who writhed and struggled, but never uttered a cry.

Again and again it fell, cutting the clothing as if with a knife, and drawing blood, while the little man, with his puny strength, writhed in the grasp of his brutal foe and tried to get closer to him, his blue eyes blazing with impotent fury.

The unequal struggle went on in dead silence, only broken by the heavy blows of the quirt and the trampling of feet, as James Arthur writhed and struggled. Bill Travers at last cried out:

"By gosh, Tom, let him go. Don't cut the poor little cuss to pieces. He's game."

"I'll cut the game out of him," was the savage answer; "he's got to kneel down and beg, or I'll kill him."

And the cruel chastisement went on, till Arthur in a last despairing effort, managed to tear his coat from Tom Johnson's grip, and was free for one second.

Bill Travers saw it and interposed to shield the little man from further punishment, thinking he would flee, when to the amazement of every one in the room, Arthur, instead of fleeing, dashed in, closed on the huge cowboy, wreathed his arms round the other's neck, and sunk his face into Tom Johnson's throat.

Then they heard a roar of pain from the giant, saw him clutch up the other in his powerful arms and dash him on the floor, while blood ran from his neck where the little man had torn him with his teeth like a wild beast.

Then Tom Johnson sprung back to striking distance, and laid on the stunned figure one of those blows from the long quirt such as only a cowboy knows how to give, and such as he had not yet given.

Even the hardened ruffians round shuddered to see and hear it, as Johnson howled furiously:

"Bite, will ye? I'll cut yer heart out, but what I'll make ye beg."

A second blow, and the other writhed up and sprung at the cowboy like a wildcat, managing

to get inside his guard, clasping his leg and biting again like a wild beast. His face was as white as a sheet, his eyes bloodshot and haggard, but he seemed absolutely incapable of fear, though he was so weak that Tom shook him off like a child and resumed his cruel punishment.

But the third blow failed to rouse him, and he lay still, when Bill Travers stepped resolutely in, and said, firmly:

"That will do, Tom. You've killed him, and it's a darned shame. Parson or no, he was game to the backbone. You don't strike another blow while I'm here."

"I don't wanter," growled Tom, in a surly tone. "Gawl darn his mulish temper, he's tuck a hull inch of flesh out of my throat, the p'izen varmint! Let's see if he's dead."

He stirred the senseless body with his foot, and rolled it over. There lay the poor little fellow, his black coat all cut to pieces, covered with blood and dust, his pale face still as if in death, his slender form curled up, limp and nerveless.

"Gawl darn yer skin!" said Tom, in a vengeful tone, shaking his fist at the body. "I've taken the temper out of ye, ye little skunk! I wish he'd open his eyes, darn him. I hate to leave him till he's begged."

As he spoke, as if by magic, the eyes of the injured man opened and blazed up into his own with the same hatred and scorn as before.

Tom Johnson smiled like a devil and cried out as he stepped back, drawing his long quirt through his left hand:

"Now, ye p'izen little skunk, I've got ye. Do ye beg pardon?"

There was a dead silence in the room, amid which they heard the injured man say in a husky whisper:

"I told you to kill me or I shall kill you. You're a coward, a coward, a coward! Do you hear? Kill me!"

"By gosh, that's easy enough," said Tom, with a ferocious grin, and as he spoke he drew back the long quirt for a last cut at his utterly helpless foe, when Bill Travers and another man burst in between with a volley of oaths to prevent the atrocity, and Tom sulkily abandoned the attempt, saying:

"I don't want to kill him, darn him."

"You'd better," whispered the fallen man, "I ask no mercy from a coward."

"Oh, come, come," cried Bill Travers, not ill-naturedly, "don't be so darned cantankerous, parson. You seem to want to be cut to pieces, you do."

"Ay, ay," said the other man. "You'd orter kep' outer here, you'd ought. You ain't fit fur these diggin's."

The fallen man looked up, and whispered:

"I'm going to stay, if that man doesn't kill me now, and I'm going to make him own he's a coward before you all. So be'd better kill me."

The words were so coldly menacing, so utterly unsuited to the actual helpless condition of the poor little fellow, as he lay in the blood and dirt, that it caused a ripple of laughter, and Tom Johnson, who had recovered his good-humor, sneeringly inquired:

"And how are you going to show I'm a coward, my little rooster?"

"By making you beg my pardon," said Arthur, faintly. "I'll get you as helpless as you have got me, and I'll see if you won't beg. So kill me now, for I'll never give you another chance."

Tom Johnson scowled at him, and for a moment his hand wandered to his pistol, but a general groan made him pause, and the fallen man, too weak to raise his head, laughed faintly as he whispered:

"I told you he was a coward, gentlemen. He's afraid of me now."

"You lie," cried Johnson, fiercely, and as he spoke he dealt the fallen man another terrible blow with the quirt before he could be stopped, calling forth a cry of:

"Coward! coward! I defy you!"

The next minute came a rattling volley outside, followed by the patter of bullets through the window, and Bill Travers shouted:

"Git up and git, boys. Muleville's on the tear, too."

In fact the cowboys, in their interest in watching Tom Johnson's attempt to whip the spirit out of the stranger, had become so silent that Muleville had taken heart to itself, and turned out *en masse* with rifle and shot-gun, to hunt the hunters and drive the bullies who had undertaken to clean out the town from its sacred precincts.

And Muleville was always cautious in undertaking a job of the sort.

Muleville was well aware of the moral effect of an opening volley and a rush; and Muleville was quite correct in its judgment on this occasion.

The shower of bullets hit two or three cowboys, and stampeded the whole gang, who rushed out to their horses and galloped away, full speed, shooting as they went.

To be sure they charged back again more than once, and kept up a hot running fight for near half an hour, but Muleville on foot, behind

walls, was too much for the wild and untamed cowboy "on a tear."

One by one the intruders galloped away, and when Joab Appleby came back to his bar-room, he found his unhappy little guest, covered with blood and dirt, lying senseless on the floor, and carried him to bed with many expressions of regret, not unmixed with contempt, at the idea of such a puny specimen of humanity coming to the cattle country to live.

There he lay in the upper room of the Metropolitan Hotel for ten long days—to him—of fever and misery, his poor little body covered with wounds which made every movement a torture, though he never complained.

He had no doctor, for the medical profession in Muleville was at a discount; but perhaps he was none the worse off for that. Joab Appleby and the Mulevillians, with all their rough exterior and reckless ways, had kind hearts, and even the "judge" came to see the injured man in a manner far from unkind.

The landlord wrapped him up in a wet sheet—the only sheet in the house, by the way—and treated him to a sweat, besides feeding him on chicken broth and beef soup, as the traditionally proper thing for a sick man.

He was left much alone, and that did him no harm, for he slept a good deal and gained strength in his sleep. The result of the "let alone" system, with the pure mountain air of Muleville, was that, in two weeks from the day James Arthur entered the hotel, he dressed himself and came down-stairs, pale and thin, but able to walk.

He had on a suit of shabby old clothes—that seemed to be all he had left besides his solitary black coat, ruined in his chastisement by the cowboys—and said to Joab Appleby:

"Landlord, God bless you for what you've done for me. All the money I have in the world is fifteen dollars. Here it is. I know I owe you more than that, but I cannot pay it till I have earned something. Can you tell me what I can do for a living in these parts?"

Joab Appleby stared at him in a manner indicating embarrassment and scratched his head thoughtfully. He quietly put away the money the little man offered him, and said:

"No, no, Jimmy; I don't want that. Keep it till ye get a place. See hyar. Be you sot on stayin' hyar? You'd better go to hum. This ain't no fittin' place fur you. It wants men with muckle, and you ain't got nothen but grit."

Arthur shook his head and sighed.

"I can't go home. I must stay here. If I'd known what I know now, I might never have come, but now I'm here, I shall stay. My cough has gone already. Do you think I could get a place on a cattle ranch?"

The landlord shook his head.

"Don't try it, Jimmy. You've seen what the cowboys is. Tell ye what. You're sot on stayin' hyar?"

"I am determined."

"Very well. There air jest one thing you kin do and that's all. You kin go on a sheep ranch. Tain't no work at all, and the pay's good. How'd ye like that?"

The young man's face flushed.

"I should be very grateful for any chance. I'm poor, and my people are poor too. Where do you think I could get such a place?"

"You go up to the mountings to Macdonald's Ranch—it's about forty mile from hyar—and ax to see old Bill Toucey, overseer. Tell him I sent ye. He'll give ye a place. Lordy, them sheep ranches has to take any one. You'll get ten dollars a month and yer keep at fust, seein' ye don't know nothen 'baout sheep, but I reckon ye'll larn. Let's see; you'll hav to foot it, and you ain't able yet."

"Yes, I am," responded Arthur, firmly. "It will do me good. Only tell me the way to go, and I'll be off at once."

"That's right. You're grit, I see," said the kind-hearted landlord, nodding. Then he gave him directions for his long tramp, and had the satisfaction, not long after, of seeing the little man take his departure, walking steadily on till he was lost in the dusty distance. Joab Appleby shook his head as he went back to his bar, muttering:

"Pore little cuss, I'll never see him again."

CHAPTER III.

THE GENTLE SHEPHERD.

BUT on the cattle trail in the great fall drive, two years later, a herd of five thousand beesves was being driven slowly on its way to the great receiving station at Stocktown, on the railroad.

The snowy summit of "Old Baldy," towering fifteen thousand feet in the air, dominated the landscape for miles in every direction; and the character of the country, covered with luxuriant grasses, interspersed with clumps of noble trees, has given it for many years a widespread reputation as one of the "Parks" of Colorado.

Staying slowly along the broad and well-defined cattle trail were the herds of bullocks, feeding as they went, for night was approaching.

The cowboys were circling round the outer fractions of the vast concourse at a steady gallop, driving in the stragglers and getting ready for the night, in a place where the herbage was

unusually rich, while the pleasant rippling waters of a beautiful stream promised the best of entertainment for the beasts.

Mr. William Travers, better known to his friends as "Billy Bounce," on account of his loud voice and flow of profanity, was in charge of the herd, with fifty men under his orders, and had been having quite an anxious time on the road.

It seemed that, within a year past, the sheep ranches had been slowly but surely encroaching on the domain of the cattle men, destroying the best pastures; and the shepherds, who had been held in contempt in old times as "crawlers," because they went on foot, had lately turned their attention to the art of shooting, for purposes of self-defense, with such success that, on one occasion, not many weeks before, they had driven off a whole gang of cowboys trespassing on a sheep ranch, and had killed five of the intruders, ten miles from the place where Mr. Travers was about to encamp for the night.

That was one of the reasons why Bill Travers had brought with him such an unusually large force, and why he said to his men on that evening:

"Boys, we'll have to keep our eyes skinned to-night. Git yer suppers, a third of ye at a time, and let the rest keep watch. Them pesky shepherds mout take a notion to stampede the stock, and we ain't only two days from Stocktown, so we can't expect much sleep."

The men sulkily acquiesced, though they were already pretty well worn out with want of rest. A cowboy on the trail and the same man "on the tear" are very different beings. The one is silent and moody, watchful and alert, ready to leap into his saddle at all times and ride day and night to save his herd from damage; the other, relieved from responsibility, with his pockets full of money, thinks of nothing but excitement.

Bill Travers and his gang were all tired and haggard, ill-disposed to talk except for an occasional oath, but ready to bear it all for the prospect of relief at Stocktown, whither the "boss" had already gone ahead, to make arrangements for the shipping of his cattle to Chicago.

The sun had sunk to rest behind the snowy peaks of "Old Baldy," the stars twinkled like diamonds in the clear, dry mountain atmosphere, and the cattle were feeding quietly in the park, as the tired herders got off their horses to cook their suppers. The little fires were soon burning the coffee-pots boiling, and the men baking their hard "dodgers" or frying slap-jacks in pork fat, when Bill Travers heard one of them say:

"That 'ere's the very place, Lige. I hearn Scarfaced Jake tell 'bout it. He shot all round Jake, and he ain't no slouch nuther, Jake ain't. But t'other feller he's jest a wonder, he is, and only a shepherd at that."

"Who's that you're talkin' on, Joe?" asked Travers, curiously; for the mention of shooting always stirs the soul of a cowboy.

Joe Downey, better known as "Conky Joe," for some mysterious reason which the cowboys themselves could hardly have explained, looked up and answered:

"Ob, jest the 'Gentle Shepherd,' as they call him."

"And who's the Gentle Shepherd?"

"A feller that lives up on Macdonald's Ranch, the same that druv off Ike Collins's gang on the Ten Leaguers' Drive."

"The Ten Leaguers" were well known as belonging to the "Ten League Ranch," one of the largest in the territory, and its members were notorious for being desperate fighters under the lead of Ike Collins.

Bill Travers looked interested.

"Were it Ike Collins's gang as got whipped?" he asked. "Why, I used ter b'long to that gang east, and it were a mighty tough one."

"Tough or not," retorted Joe, "they got their mutton cooked fur 'em by the Gentle Shepherd. He jest cleaned 'em out that time, and they do say 'twere him alone as did all the killin' in the first rush. But Jake Horton's seen him since. Whar's Jake? He went up to the ranch to see the Gentle Shepherd. He'll tell ye all about him. Hyar he comes now, gawl darn him, too much in a hurry fur his grub to give a galoot a chance to swaller."

As he closed, he resignedly overturned his frying pan and put up his clasp knife, as Jake Horton, or "Scarfaced Jake," another cowboy, rode in, crying ill-temperedly:

"Gawl darn your lazy skin, Conky Joe, don't you s'pose nobody don't want no grub till you've filled your karkidge with grease? Come on and take your turn like a man."

Conky Joe, being full, was better natured than Jake, who was hungry, so he mounted and rode off, while Jake turned his pony loose and set to work at his own supper like a famished wolf, no one interrupting till his appetite was appeased.

Then Bill Travers observed:

"Say, Jake, what d'you know 'bout the Gentle Shepherd?"

Jake started visibly, and the long red scar on his face seemed to burn like fire as he answered slowly:

"He's a darned good man; so much I kin

sw'ar to; and he kin beat any man in Colorado on fine shootin'."

Bill Travers swore an oath.

"Say, Jake, that's sayin' a good deal. We've got some mighty good shots."

"I don't keer what you've got," the cowboy returned, with another oath. "I'll bet you drinks fur the hull gang he kin shoot the legs off you or any man in this crowd. I've had 'nuff of him fur my part. I used ter think I k'ud shoot, but I don't say no more when the Gentle Shepherd's round the diggin's, I don't."

"When did you see him, Jake?"

"A year ago, last July. My stock tuk a stampede, and I follerred them into Macdonald's Ranch. The men on the ranch treated me right well, I must say; fur they corralled my beasts and helped me to market, but I must needs, like a durned fool, go to that ranch on my way back, on a tear. Tell ye, I got all the tear I wanted, boys."

"How, how?" asked several.

"How? Why they jest roped me as cute as if they'd all farned ropin' from babbies, and guv me sich a lambastin', I was sore fur a week, me and six more of my size. But that warn't what skeered me."

"What did?" asked Bill.

"Well, arter the rumpus was over, I met the Gentle Shepherd out alone, when I had five with me. Darn my skin, if he didn't drop every man I had, and he all alone, and then give me this here scar to remember him by. He mout hev killed me too, but he didn't, and when I come to—fur he stunned me with his bullet—he had both my pistols and my hoss, and told me I'd have to hoof it to San Pedro to teach me manners. I don't want no more Gentle Shepherd. I do believe he's the devil disguised."

"What sort of a feller does he look like, then?" asked Bill. "He ain't got horns and huffs, has he?"

"No he ain't. For the matter of that he's a pusillanimous looking skunk a common man c'u'd jest turn over his knee and spank. But I tell ye, no common man kin ever get the chance to do it."

"Whar does he live?" asked Bill in a tone of curiosity.

Jake pointed toward "Baldy."

"Out yonner on the ranch at the foot of the maunting. I've heern tell he were goin' to sell out and go to cattle-raisin' this winter. Ef he do, I'd recommend other herds to keep out of his way, unless they're in a clear claim of thar own, or hired of summun as has rights under the law. They say the Gentle Shepherd never bruk the peace yet, though he's dropped 'leven men this year. Self defense every time."

"I tell ye what, boys," observed Bill thoughtfully. "Ef we're gwine to let a new hand cow us all down in this way, we mout as well go outer the biz. We cattle men has the name of bein' on the fight, and the gals'll p'int at us if we give in to a shepherd. I tell you what I reckon we'd better do. What d'ye say, when we've sold out at Stocktown, to comin' back this way, and jest cleanin' aout this here Gentle Shepherd. We've got the boys as kin do it."

The proposal, in its naked, lawless deviltry, just suited the rest of the gang—all but Scar-faced Jake.

While the men were shouting approval, the di-figured hero observed gricly:

"All right, boys, if you say so. But I ain't into the racket, and you won't be nuther, arter you've met the Gentle Shepherd."

"Oh, persimmons!" snapped Bill.

"Give us a rest with your Gentle Shepherd. I've heern hull families blow, and it hain't amounted to nothin' when ye kum to see the man. What kin he do that we can't do?"

"I'll tell ye what he kin do," responded Jake, deliberately. "He kin shoot six birds a-flyin' with single bullets out of his revolver, and he kin shoot behind his back almost as well as in front. He never needs more nor one bullet to do the biz fur any one."

"Well, we'll see," said Bill, "as we come back from market. I don't b'lieve he ever cleaned out Ike Collins, and I won't b'lieve it till I see it!"

"I don't know nothin' 'bout Ike Collins," returned Jake sulkily. "I've heern him called a good man too, but I didn't see his muss. I reckon the Shepherd cleaned him out, though."

"Mebbe he did, and mebbe he didn't," said Bill obstinately. "I only wish the cuss would happen this way arter we've got our cattle off our hands, but—"

Even as he spoke they heard a low, rumbling noise in the midst of the herd, and every man leaped to his feet, Bill yelling excitedly:

"Scatter and head 'em! Let 'em hear you, boys!"

They all knew well enough what was coming.

A bullock had been frightened in the densest part of the herd by some trifle, and the other beasts were catching the infection and threatening a stampede.

And a stampede of several thousand cattle is enough to appall any man.

The cowboys, yelling at the top of their voices to make the cattle sensible of their presence, swept round the herd, swinging their long quirts and trying to restrain the beasts from running.

For nearly five minutes it was a question whether they would not succeed, and then came the deep rumbling bellow which told that the bulls were aroused, as the whole vast mass began galloping, as luck would have it, on the very trail they were already pursuing to the railway station, at a pace of ten miles an hour.

All thought of the Gentle Shepherd and his men vanished from the minds of Bill Travers and his cowboys that night as they dashed on.

One absorbing thought had expelled everything else from their minds:

"Would they be able to save the herd, or would they lose two-thirds on the way?"

Away dashed the enormous mass of cattle straight as an arrow, on the trail to Stocktown, reckless of the nature of the ground, heeding nothing in the way.

A tall volcanic rock loomed up on the road, and the wild cattle dashed at it and fell in heaps in their blind terror, before the herd split on either side.

A stream crossed their path and into it they dashed, swimming depth, trampling down the weaker beasts on the bank and still keeping on.

The cattle men followed them into, through or over every obstacle, and emerged, after crossing the river, into an open plain, over which the great herd swept at the same rapid pace, hour after hour, till the moon rose.

Then Bill Travers looked ahead, and saw in the distance the well-known lights of Stocktown, realizing that they had come, what was in general a two days' journey, in less than six hours, under the pressure of the stampede.

And then the cattle began to stop and falter at last, and the indomitable cowboys succeeded in heading them and driving them off the trail into the plains, where they halted and dropped by hundreds, panting and foaming, utterly exhausted by their terrible race and the terror which had caused it.

And then Bill Travers wiped his brow, and said wearily:

"They're safe now. Set the watch, and git what sleep ye kin afore day. I misdoubt we've lost more'n a thousand head."

They drove in the fractious on the outskirts of the herd, and then fell on the hard ground, utterly tired out, and slept soundly till dawn.

When daylight came they were able to estimate the damage.

All along the road they had come, as far as the eye could see, lay carcasses of cattle that had been trampled to death as they fell in the stampede, while the survivors seemed to be too much exhausted to feed, and lay on the grass with lolling tongues, as if they were never going to rise again. Bill sent a couple of cowboys on to Stocktown to report his misfortune, and rode back himself, with a dozen men, to collect any beasts that might be left on the road, able to get up.

As they went, they counted the carcasses and the crippled, till they came to the place where the stampede had originated.

In their whole journey of nearly thirty miles, they found less than fifty cattle able to go on, while three hundred and fifty seven had been killed outright, and nearly eight hundred crippled so that they would have to be killed where they lay.

And in the park from whence they had stampeded they found at last the cause of all this loss, in a flock of sheep whose bleating had startled the cattle in the night, coming on them by surprise, and Bill Travers observed with a savage curse:

"I thought as much. It's that gawl darned Gentle Shepherd's done it. But I'll be even with him. Shoot the darned bleatin' cusses, gawl darn 'em."

And with that he pulled out his revolver and began to shoot down the poor innocent sheep, gazing at him in their silly way, and not offering even to run away, till he had emptied every chamber in the weapon, and said vengefully:

"There, gawl darn ye! I wish that 'ere Gentle Shepherd was here. Darned if I wouldn't serve him out too. Come on, boys. We'll hev to send out a train to save what meat we kin, when we git to Stocktown."

And the cowboys rode away on the road to Stocktown, where they arrived in the evening and delivered the remainder of their cattle, the loss on the whole herd being estimated at over twenty thousand dollars, and causing the "Boss" to swear deep and desperate vengeance on the "Gentle Shepherd" of Macdonald's Ranch, of whom every cowboy had heard so much lately.

CHAPTER IV.

STOCKTOWN.

At the same time that Bill Travers and his men were paid off in Stocktown, it happened that another herd from another quarter arrived in the stock yards, headed by a man who had the reputation of being one of the hardest fighters on the range.

This man was Tom Johnson, who had succeeded to the charge of the Ten League Ranch herds, after the untimely demise of the lamented Isaac Collins, and who had just brought in the season's drive, having purposely passed through the very middle of Macdonald's Ranch, to

"clean out" the Gentle Shepherd, if that person should be foolish enough to get in his way.

Bill Travers met Johnson in the hall of the cattle exchange after his business was concluded, and was at once greeted in true cowboy style, with a volley of affectionate oaths, as Tom Johnson recognized him.

"Why, Bill Boance, darn your old liver and lights, how are ye, ye dodrotted old hoss-thief? Burn my eyes ef I ain't glad to see ye, ye consarned old varmint. Come and h'iste p'izen. Bet ye five dollars I kin put ye under the table."

"Ye consarned old galoot, ye ain't got no more show to drink me under the table than ye ever had," was the profanely cordial response. "I'm holler way down to my boots, and I kin drain a bar'l of whisky at one swaller. Whar did ye come from, Tom? I've jest got in."

"So did I. Brought in three thousand prime three-year olds, and druv 'em plum through the center of that old dodrotted Macdonald's Ranch, by gum! Cleaned out that 'ere Gentle Shepherd we've beern tell on so much, and didn't leave hide nor hair of him, gawl darn him."

"The hen and chickens you say! You cleaned out the Gentle Shepherd? Why, I thought he were a reg'lar tearer. Scarfaced Jake told me—"

"Scarfaced Jake be darned! Don't I know? Didn't I take the hull herd right through his hull ranch, and burned the buildin's, on'y the night afore last? I tell ye, the Gentle Shepherd ain't no good."

Bill Travers looked at his friend in amazement, as they stood at the bar, with a crowd of cowboys round them, all "b'isting p'izen."

"Waal, I swow, Tom," he said at last. "I thort they was gassin' too much 'bout this Gentle Shepherd; but I didn't b'lieve he'd knuckle down so easy. Wby, the dodrotted skunk, or some of his darned sheep, got my beasts stampered yesterday night, and we lost a thousand head."

"Ye didn't see the cuss, did yer?" asked Tom Johnson, eagerly.

"See him? No. Put we seen the sheep arter we went back."

"War it a big flock?"

"No. 'Bout thirty head, I reckon."

Tom Johnson swore a huge oath.

"Then the dodrotted skunk hain't sold out, arter all."

"Sold out? What d'yer mean?"

"I mean when we got to the ranch, we didn't find hide, nor hair of a sheep round the place. Everything were gone, shepherds and all, and we heard as how Macdonald had sold out and left the sheep biz."

"Then ye didn't clean out the ranch, arter all," observed Bill slowly.

"Yes, we did, I tell ye. We burned all the huts we found and leff a notice on a tree as how Tom Johnson did it, and he'd whip the Gentle Shepherd wherever he found him. Ain't that cleanin' out? I tell ye, Bill, matters is come to a pretty pass, when a dodrotted shepherd's gwine to wipe out Ike Collins, as good a man as ever straddled a broncho. Boss Pacbeco hev put me in charge of the Ten Leaguers, and Colorado ain't big enough to hold me and the Gentle Shepherd together. One of us two has got to go under."

Bill Travers looked still more thoughtful.

"Say, Tom," he observed, "how'd ye hear that Macdonald had gone out of the sheep biz? Who told ye?"

"Heard it on the market. Sold out his hull flock, so the boys say, and has tuk a cattle ranch, out by Bushwhacker's Crick. I don't know how 'is fur certain, but it don't look like it, if them darned sheep was left on the ranch."

"Mebbe 'twere some strays," remarked Bill Travers, doubtfully. "Anyway, we hev got to pass by Bushwhacker's Crick on the way to Muleville. Say, Tom, why don't you and me, with the boys, take a ride that way and see if we can't find that 'ere Gentle Shepherd. I've heern so much on him it riles me every time I think about it. What's his name?"

"Darned if I know. They jest call him the Gentle Shepherd; that's all I know. Macdonald's his boss, and we kin allers find him, I reckon."

"Then are you game to go with me and hunt him up?" asked Bill.

Tom Johnson laughed scornfully.

"You bet your sweet life I'm a-gwine to pay him a visit, Billy, boy. Come, ye ain't taken your stint yet. Here's to the cattle men, as kin whip their weight in shepherds every day in the week."

And with that the cowboys, after their usual fashion, set in for a regular old-fashioned carouse, going the rounds of every saloon in Stocktown, making day and night hideous with their yells, and only prevented from mischief by the fact that they had all been deprived of their firearms, under municipal regulations, as soon as they entered the city limits, before selling their cattle.

The spree lasted a full week, and at the end of that time hardly a dollar remained in the possession of a man of the party, save the two leaders, Tom Johnson and Bill Travers.

And then, when their money was gone and trust no longer obtainable from the experienced

barkeepers of Stocktown, the cowboys began to fade away from the town like autumn roses, dropping off, one by one, and taking the road back to their ranches, hundreds of miles away, in a decidedly demoralized condition. Nearly a third of them were hovering on the borders of delirium tremens, their nerve all gone, too shaky to shoot, pale and thin from the long debauch, as different as could be imagined from the trim, stalwart fellows, bronzed with the sun of the cattle ranges, who had ridden into Stocktown a week since, behind Tom Johnson and Bill Travers.

Those two redoubtable leaders had exercised a little more caution than the men, and when they found themselves deserted, got to their horses and rode away before they were utterly penniless.

As they passed the marshal at the town limits and reclaimed their pistols, that official observed:

"Say, boys, did ye know the Queen Ranch drive come in yesterday? I seen the Queen herself as she passed, and she's got a new overseer, a little cuss be he, smart as chain lightnin', and rides sich a hoss as ain't common in these parts."

Both men looked interested and excited; for the "Queen Ranch" was well known all over the cattle range, as belonging to a young and handsome woman, whose father had been killed in one of the affrays so common in the cattle country, and who had managed the ranch ever since on her own sole responsibility, with such success that she had been unanimously christened the "Queen of the Ranchmen," and her place, which had formerly been known, after her father's name, as the "Wallace Ranch" had been changed by general consent to the "Queen Ranch."

"Yes," pursued the marshal, "'twere the queen herself, pritty as a pictor, and she had a right smart chance of three-year-olds with her. Ef you boys hadn't spent all your boddle, ye might her had a chance to ride hum with her."

"Is she a-gwine to ride hum?" asked Bill Travers eagerly. "Thought she used ter go in the stage."

"Waal," observed the marshal in a thoughtful way, "that depends. One reason, I've heern tell, why she allers used ter go in the stage, was that her men, arter payin' off, got so blind drunk she couldn't get 'em off with her; but I heern her say to the overseer she war gwine to try it this time, ef he'd stick by her."

"Reckon ef he does, he'll be the only one," remarked Tom Johnson in a sarcastic tone. "The boys ain't gwine to be choked off a tear, by no new overseer, ef they won't stay fur the queen. Come, Bill, 'tain't no use our stayin' hyar. We ain't no fittin' kumpiny fur the queen, till we gets toned up a bit."

And the two men galloped off on the road to their ranches, with a passing regret that they had not seen the celebrated heiress, Kate Wallace; but soon forgot all about it as they pursued their way.

Meantime, in the city of Stocktown, in the principal hotel of the place, the very woman of whom they had been speaking, Miss Kate Wallace, a slight willowy young lady in a riding habit, was pacing to and fro, in a large private parlor, relieving her mind by the free use of her tongue, to a trio of big hulking cowboys, who stood before her, looking penitent and shame-faced, while she scolded them violently, but with a choice of language which sounded to them very mild in comparison with the oaths to which they were accustomed.

In the corner of the room sat a small, slender man, with a fair, handsome face, who looked as if the business did not concern him in the least, though she occasionally turned to him and made him part of the harangue.

"You ought to be ashamed to act so after all I've done for you," she was saying, "and especially when you remember that I am the only lady in this business in Colorado. Didn't you promise me on your words as gentlemen that you would not drink a drop in Stocktown, and haven't you broken your words? I thought I could trust you, and you have deceived me. It would serve you right if I were to discharge you at once. Look at Mr. Shepherd there, your overseer. Isn't he as fit as any of you to take charge of a herd?—and yet he is a strict temperance man. You, Charley Brown, you seem to think no man can be a man unless he is a ruffian."

"No, I don't, marm," answered the man she addressed, turning his hat in his hands, apologetically; "but ye know it's hard to teach an old dog new ways. We've b'en used to goin' on a tear arter payin' off, and me and the boys couldn't stand it nohow. Ye see, the other boys was so pressin'."

"So pressing," she retorted, scornfully, "and so you, you great baby, hadn't the strength of mind to say no. I don't want any such men in my service, I can tell you; so the sooner you find another employer the better."

Charley Brown turned pale and stammered confusedly:

"No, marm, ye wouldn't do that, would ye? I swear I won't do it again. Lord love ye, marm, the Queen's boys has the name of bein' suckin' parsons, every one of 'em, but we don't

mind that, as long as you let us stay. Didn't we know the cunnel, yer daddy, when you was no bigger'n a doll? Let us off this time, marm, and it don't happen again, I 'shore ye."

Kate Wallace hesitated a moment.

"If I let you off, you'll disgrace me again," she said.

"No, we won't, marm," cried the three men in earnest chorus. "I leaves it to Parson Jim," said one of them in conclusion, pointing to the little man in the corner, "if we didn't come with him, peaceable, as soon as he told us."

Parson Jim, who looked about as much like a clergyman as he did like a cowboy, nodded his head and said, in low, smooth tones:

"He speaks the truth, Miss Wallace. Not one of them disobeyed the order, as soon as I had explained it."

Kate Wallace whirled round and pointed her finger at the only cowboy who had said nothing so far. He was a burly, powerful man, with a dark face and black beard; but the most remarkable part of his appearance was the fact that both of his eyes were in deep mourning, with a bruise between them that was still swelled to the size of an egg.

"Who gave you that black eye?" she asked, imperiously. "You, Pedro, I mean. Did you come quietly?"

The man looked at the ground and his face worked as he answered:

"Si, senora, I come. Don Diego, he say come, I come."

"But who gave you the black eye?" she persisted, and Pedro closed his lips firmly and looked down at the ground with all the silent obstinacy of a Mexican half-breed, resolved not to say a word.

Kate Wallace patted her foot on the ground angrily.

"Are you going to tell me?" she asked, "or must I discharge you. I don't allow my men to be whipped by strangers, drunk or sober."

"He warn't whipped by no stranger, marm," said Charley Brown, in a low voice. "Twere only a little unpleasantness atwixt some of us, all to ourselves, and 'twere all explained. Please don't ax, marm. It sha'n't happen again."

"Did you strike him?" asked Kate persistently.

"Me, marm? No. Tell ye the truth, I was nigh gittin' one myself, but I ain't a glutton and I knows when I has enough, marm."

"Did you strike him, Bill Marks?" pursued the heiress, turning to the other cowboy, who only shook his head, but said nothing.

"Then if it was not you or any of you, it must have been a stranger," Kate Wallace said angrily. "I insist on knowing, or I will discharge you all. Was it a stranger?"

"No, marm, it warn't no stranger," said Bill Marks stoutly. "Ef it had b'en, there'd hev b'en more muss than you see. The Queen's Ranch don't knock under to no strangers, weepins or no weepins. It were one of our men, and he knocked Pedro stiff fer sayin' what he hadn't orter said. And then Parson Jim, he told us to come outer that, peaceable, and we come. That's all, marm."

Kate Wallace looked hard at all of her retainers; but not one would meet her eye, except the little man in the corner, who looked up with an innocent lamb-like gaze that seemed to irritate her for some reason; for she said pettishly:

"I wish I could get at the bottom of this affair, Mr. Shepherd. Did you see the trouble? Who was it tanned Pedro, so that he obeyed your order?"

The little man in the corner looked up as innocently as before, and made answer in the same sweet voice:

"No one tanned him, Miss Wallace. I am happy to say that all of our own men are amenable to reason. I merely explained to Pedro that it was necessary to obey your order, sent through me, and he at once saw that my advice was reasonable, and followed it. You know the boys like me, because I talk reason to them."

"Is that the reason they call you Parson Jim?" she asked sharply.

He smiled placidly.

"A little joke of theirs. You must allow them a vent for their sense of humor. I've had a dozen nicknames since I came to Colorado. I suppose they call me 'Parson' on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, because I never preach, but talk reason."

"On the *what* principle?" she asked, looking suspiciously at him.

"I beg your pardon," he answered. "I sometimes forget where I am, and lapse into latinisms. I mean that the name is ironical."

Her face flushed slightly, and she said to the three cowboys in a tone of decided ill-temper:

"Go and get your horses. I am going to start for the mountains in an hour. Get the boys together. I'll see if you can keep your word now?"

They shuffled out of the room, nudging each other with covert grins, as if to congratulate each other on getting off so easily, and the impudent young heiress said to Shepherd:

"I wish to say a word to you, sir."

He rose from his corner and stood before her,

a sufficiently neat and dapper little figure of a man, but strangely effeminate for the office he was holding.

Kate Wallace took her seat in a large armchair before a mirror, and could not restrain an approving glance at her own figure before she spoke. In truth she had no reason to be ashamed of it.

Born in Colorado, and reared to active exercise from infancy, save for a few years schooling in the East, after her father had made a fortune, Kate was a wiry, energetic little lady, with the small hands and feet of her Mexican mother, the lambent black eyes and rich complexion of the Spanish race, conjoined to the tawny hair of her Scottish-American father. Lithe and willowy in figure, a perfect rider from her light weight and supple activity, she was yet a lady, with the education of the average American girl, guiltless of French and German perhaps, not much of a musician, but well read on American subjects, and talking Spanish as her native tongue, as well as English.

A handsome girl, a western girl, free in manner and utterly fearless, accustomed to see rough men bow in homage before her, she yet seemed to be somewhat embarrassed now, perhaps for the first time in her life.

Meantime the little man whom she had called Shepherd stood quietly and respectfully before her, waiting her pleasure, a broad Mexican sombrero in his hand, bound with a cable-like cord of gold threads, with bullion ends. He was clad in the usual finery of the Mexican *jarocho* or *raquero*, to which the Colorado cowboys have taken so eagerly, but in his case it was cut with a finikin precision that gave him a theatrical appearance not lessened by the fact that his long hair, of pale flaxen hue, was curled with a care that suggested curl papers over night.

She glanced over his slight figure with an appearance of dislike, and at last said:

"Well, sir, do you mean to say that you are determined to keep the secret, too?"

"What secret, Miss Wallace?" he asked very calmly, with a covert smile.

"Oh, you know what I mean well enough," she retorted. "How did you, who have no more physical strength than a boy, manage to cow Pedro, whom I know to be a desperado? Who was it helped you, sir?"

He smiled and tapped his forehead.

"This, madam. It imports not, I imagine, so long as he is controlled. Have you any orders for me?"

"None, thank you," she said pettishly. "You can go."

He bowed low, and backed to the door, when she suddenly interrupted his exit by saying, imperiously:

"Come here, sir!"

He obeyed, still with the same covert smile on his face which she had noticed, and broke out, irritably:

"What is the reason, Mr. Shepherd, I never can tell but what you are laughing at me? Do you realize that you are merely my overseer, sir, in my service, and bound to be respectful to me?"

"If I had not realized it before, madam, I could not fail to do so now that you do me the honor to speak so plainly," he replied, with the same air of quiet mockery.

Kate flushed scarlet and stamped her little foot, as she burst out:

"Then how dare you sneer at me and quote Latin before me, sir? You are not what you seem, I really believe; and I begin to think you are a gambler or something of that sort. I will not be laughed at by my own men. Do you understand me, sir?"

He bowed as he replied:

"It is difficult to misunderstand such plain talk. You appear to be scolding me for knowing Latin. I am sorry I let the expression escape me, and I will try to remember in future that I am only an overseer of cowboys, in your service. Have you any further orders, madam?"

He did not seem to be hurt in the slightest by her imperious tone, and on the contrary, appeared to find it a hard task to keep from laughing outright at the heiress, who was used to see men awkward and bashful before her.

She frowned at him, and shook her finger in the way in which she had scolded so many awkward servitors, as she said:

"Very well; take care you remember it, or we shall part. Remember, you came to me without any character from your last employer, and I only took you into my service because you seemed to be a man of education, who could take some of the labor of my accounts from my shoulders. But don't think I depend on you, for I don't. I got on before you came, and I can get on if you choose to leave me."

His face became grave instantly, as he said in a low voice:

"Nay, now I confess I do not wish to understand you, Miss Wallace."

"And why not, sir?" she asked, her eyes flashing on him, as if she were angry at his tone.

"Because I should not like to think you ungenerous and unjust," he said.

Now she flushed scarlet.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that I have said no word that entitles you to insult me by a threat of dismissal, madam," he answered, slowly and distinctly; "but, since you have made it, I take you at your word. Please to look for another overseer at once. Good-morning."

And without another word he swept her a low obeisance and went to the door, while Kate Wallace, too much amazed at this sudden independence to stir for a moment, opened wide her black eyes and sat with lips half apart till he had opened the door and was half-way out, when she suddenly leaped up, flew to the door, caught the little overseer by the collar, pulled him back unresistingly, and ran him across the room to the sofa, where she plumped him down, her face flushed with the exertion, her eyes sparkling like diamonds, and panted out:

"How dare you? How dare you?—you—impudent—you—*How dare you take me at my word?* You sha'n't go! Do you hear me? I say you shall not go till I've broken your spirit. You're the first man ever dared defy me, and I'll keep you in my service just as long as I please. So now."

He looked up at her in a singular way, as he asked quietly:

"Don't you think you are undertaking rather more than you can accomplish, Miss Wallace?"

"No, sir. I've set my heart on it since you looked at me in that insolent manner," she retorted, hotly. "I know well enough what your eyes mean. I've read it before in better looking faces than yours. I've had handsome overseers before, that thought I was in love with them and couldn't get along without them, and I've let them stay till they were ready to go mad with longing, when I've sent them to the right-about. They were real men, not little mothers' darlings like you, sir. And I'm going to keep you—do you hear me?—till I see that your spirit is broken and that you have given up the idea of defying my power. Then you can go—not before. Now what do you say?"

She was a wild, impetuous, spoiled child of fortune, so accustomed to her own way that she never thought of how her words would sound till he answered gravely:

"Then I am to understand that you wish me to stay with you to make love to you?"

She flushed scarlet and actually struck him with her open hand, saying passionately:

"It is false, sir. I said no such thing. I said just the contrary."

"I know you did. But if I stay, on your own confession, I have a way of looking at you that shows that I love you. Very well, then the best thing I can do is to take myself off, for I assure you, Miss Wallace, I have not the most distant idea of making love to you. In fact, you are not my style of girl at all."

He spoke with such provoking coolness that the spoiled beauty was taken aback, and inquired sarcastically:

"And what is *your* style, if I may ask, most noble prince in disguise?"

He rose up then, for she had taken her seat again, and was irritably slapping the table beside her with a riding-whip that lay on it.

He cleared his throat and answered:

"Do you wish me to be as frank as you have been with me?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly," she said, closing her lips and slapping harder than before. "Go on. Let us hear what is *your* style of girl."

Her head was turned away, and the smile on his lips became one of pronounced mockery as he said:

"In the first place, as I am a small, slender man, she should be tall for a woman and formed like the Venus of Milo—*pardon me*, perhaps you never heard of her?"

"Thank you. I have," she retorted, not turning her head. "I'm not such an ignoramus as you think in your conceit."

"In the second place," he continued, the smile spreading, "as I am fair, she should have jet-black hair and blue eyes. I love blue eyes: they are so gentle. Thirdly, as I am excitable and hot tempered, she should be amiable and gentle, with a low soft voice and a temper that nothing ruffles. A musician she must be, or I could not endure the thought of companionship for life with her; and, above all things, she must not be masculine in her ways. I don't want to marry a lady jockey, for I don't expect to remain a cowboy all my life. There, Miss Wallace, is my idea of the lady I hope to marry some day. I should not have ventured to describe her, if you had not compelled me to do so. Have you any orders, madam?"

"None," she said, without turning her head. "You can go."

He bowed and went to the door, and she never turned her head till she heard the latch snap.

Then she sprung up and gave the table a violent lash with the whip, as she muttered, through her clinched teeth:

"The insolent! I'll conquer him! I'll conquer him! He shall not triumph over me—he shall not—not if I have to marry him by—"

We regret to have to record it of Kate Wallace, even after making allowance for her early bringing up; but at this point she was

within an ace of swearing, and only checked herself as she looked out of the window and saw a group of cowboys staring up at her, she being in full view, with all her manifest agitation. The men were nudging each other and grinning, and Kate swept away from the window saying to herself:

"Never mind now. I'll keep cool; but if I don't have Jim Shepherd at my feet before I've done with him, may I never ride horse again."

CHAPTER V.

MACDONALD OF BUSHWHACKER'S.

MR. THOMAS JOHNSON and his friend, Mr. William Travers, were, as we know, old cronies. They had been together as associated cowboys on the Blossom Ranch, and now Bill was overseer of the "Fork Ford" establishment, while his friend Tom ran the "Ten League," next adjoining it, and both bordered on the largest grazing range in that part of the State, the famous "Queen Ranch," of which Kate Wallace was sole proprietor.

As in all the Western grazing countries, the herds belonging to the different proprietors fed on the open prairie, without trace of a fence to separate estates or claims, and the only points where there was any pretense to exclusive ownership lay on the water fronts, where the stock came down to drink.

The Fork Ford and Ten League ranches had always been in amity, their claims to waterfront having been settled long before, and the Queen Ranch, which lay behind them, under the shadow of the mountain peaks known as "Old Baldy," had the advantage over both, in four or five mountain brooks, which ran through its central part and encouraged a growth of grass which was the envy of the whole range.

Old Colonel Wallace, one of the first settlers of Colorado, while the flames of civil war yet convulsed the land and the frontier settlers were almost at the mercy of the Indians, had taken up this claim at the hazard of his life, and succeeded in holding it till the Pacific railroad was built, when he found himself raised from the position of a struggling herdsman, with no market for his goods nearer than Missouri, into a millionaire who could sell twenty thousand cattle a year and draw fifteen dollars a head without any more trouble and expense than he had formerly had to undergo at "rounding up" time.

The Indians, that had been used to help themselves to his beef whenever they felt so inclined, were sent to reservations, and disappeared from the cattle range, while settlers came crowding in to keep the colonel company. The wild, rollicking life of the cattle kings had begun, with its easy profits, and its consequent prodigality and reckless living.

The Wallace Ranch had had the advantage of a five years' start and an unrestricted increase of its original five thousand head during that time, sales having been difficult, so that the colonel had forty thousand head when the railroad came in, and had been able to turn his attention, after his first sale at Stocktown, to bettering his herds by importing fine cattle, and breeding horses from larger stock than the common broncho pony of the country.

The Wallace Ranch prospered for three years, and then Kate Wallace, the only daughter of the cattle-king, had been sent to an Eastern school, to "make a lady of her."

She was just ready to graduate when the news came that her father had been shot in a dispute about cattle with the herdsman of his neighbor, Mr. Luis Pacheco, of the Ten League Ranch, and the girl of nineteen became proprietor of the Wallace Ranch, under the guardianship of an old friend of her father, ex-Governor James, who managed the estate till her majority.

At the age of twenty-one, the girl had astonished the ex-Governor, who had expected her to employ a steward, by announcing that she intended for the future to manage her own affairs, and had succeeded so marvelously well that her title "Queen of the Ranchers" was universally conceded, and every cattle lord in the State vied with his neighbors in trying to scrape acquaintance with her, while the perverse and haughty beauty seemed to take a pleasure in making them all jealous of each other, and setting them to fighting duels on her account.

She behaved in business affairs just like any man, was as keen at a bargain, as prompt at enforcing her rights, and as good a judge of stock; but, business apart, she claimed her privilege of sex, and flirted desperately.

Yet, with all her independent ways, no one had ever said a word against the queen, and every man in Cristo county swore by her as the "best girl in the hull State of Colorado."

It was about a week after the return of the cowboys from market, and the ranches had resumed their usual monotonous round of duties, when a man came riding across the Ten League Ranch, coming from Bushwhacker's Creek, and going toward the Fork Ford.

He was mounted on a large American horse, though the trappings were Mexican, and his dress was that of a "boss," not a cowboy, for he wore civilized coat and trowsers, and the

only trace of the disturbed state of society in his attire was the presence of a pair of revolvers in a belt round his waist.

As he passed the Ten League, he met the cowboys on their usual steady round, driving in stragglers, and was greeted with the usual civilities of the range, for in the lonely life led by the cattle men, the presence of a stranger is always welcome.

He asked the first cowboy he met the name of the ranch he was entering, and on hearing it, said:

"Pacheco's grant, isn't it? Is Mr. Pacheco at home, do you know?"

"Reckon he don't trouble the ranch much, stranger, 'cept roundin' ups and brandin's," returned the man addressed, who was known by no other appellation than "Shorty Bill," on account of his size. "Boss Pacheco lets Tom Johnson do what he likes, and Tom ain't backward in doin' it."

"Tom Johnson, eh? Is he overseer here?" asked the stranger. "I thought Ike Collins had the job."

Shorty looked sober.

"Poor Ike got wiped out, stranger, only four months ago up in the maountings, by Macdonald's Sheep Ranch."

"Ah, indeed, and how?"

The cowboy stared.

"Waal, thought every one knowed that Ike tried to clean out the Gentle Shepherd, and the Gentle Shepherd jest set on him."

The stranger smiled.

"The Gentle Shepherd? Who is he?"

"Darned if I know, stranger. I hain't seen but one man as knows him by sight. That's Scarfaced Jake, and he ain't on this ranch. He's down at the Fork Ford, with Bill Travers."

"Indeed? Well, now, my friend, do you know I happen to be looking for this very man you call the Gentle Shepherd. I want to find him."

"The blazes you do. Kin you shoot, stranger?"

"After a fashion, but I don't want to quarrel with him, I assure you. He and I are old friends. My name is Macdonald, in fact, and he used to be my overseer."

Shorty Bill uttered a sonorous oath and wheeled his pony away to get his pistol ready.

"Be you Macdonald?" he cried. "Be it your gang as wiped out Ike?"

The stranger waved his hand, saying:

"Keep cool, keep cool. You men of Tom Johnson's gang don't fire on strangers for nothing, do you? I was away in Denver when the trouble occurred, selling my ranch, and it's in another man's hands now."

"That's different," said Shorty, more placably, "ef you ain't in sheep no more, I hain't nothen to say ag'in' ye. Be you in cattle?"

"Yes, I've taken the Bushwhacker's Creek Ranch, and I'm looking for my old overseer. By the by, do you know such a place as the Queen Ranch round here?"

"You bet. It's out yonner, under Old Baldy. Gwine thar?"

"Yes. Have you heard anything of a new overseer there?"

"No, stranger. We 'uns don't hev much to do with the Queen's men."

"Well, good-day."

And Macdonald rode off toward Fork Ford through the herds of the Ten League Ranch, till he came on Bill Travers himself, who was making his rounds, and who saluted him with:

"Hi, stranger, whar bouned? Jest in time fur grub. I'm gwine to the haouse. Come along and histe."

Macdonald bowed in answer to the rude hospitality of the offer.

"Much obliged. Are you the overseer here? What ranch is this?"

"Fork Ford, by gum, and jest the sweetest you ever set eyes on, stranger, allers barrin' the Queen's. Come from Denver, stranger?"

"No. I'm Macdonald of Bushwhacker's Creek. You're Bill Travers, I suppose, aren't you?"

"You bet, stranger."

"Well, Travers, I want to find a man round here called the Gentle Shepherd. Do you know him?"

Bill Travers uttered an explosive oath.

"Gawl darn my skin! Another man axin' fur that cuss! Why, stranger, do you know I've been wantin' to meet him fur a week, and hain't seen hide nor hair of him."

"Indeed? Have you business with him?"

"Bizi! No more nor to pick a muss on the darned galoot. I'm told he's on the fight all the time, and Tom Johnson and me is jest howlin' to get at him."

The stranger laughed.

"Well, that's singular. I suppose you know he's on the Queen Ranch now?"

"The blazes he is! No."

"So I'm informed."

"Then all I kin say," observed Bill in a grim kind of way, "is this: I ain't used ter hevin' no quar'ls with Queen's men, but by gum, if any of thar critters gits inside our lines, that'll be fresh beef for supper at Fork Ford that day. He's overseer, is he?"

Macdonald looked surprised.

"What, do you mean you'll kill a neighbor's cattle, instead of driving them back? What for?"

"Jest to ga' thar new overseer on his ear, stranger," was the cool reply. "I ain't a hog at most times, but by gum, ef a man comes round me with a chip on his shoulder I'm gwine to knock her flyin' every time."

He rode along in moody silence for awhile longer, and then observed:

"Do you know the cuss well, stranger? Is he a friend of yours?"

Macdonald laughed at the question.

"Of course not. He used to be in my service once, when I had a sheep ranch, but I sold it out in Denver the very day he had his trouble with Collins. I'm in cattle now, and I want to get him back for overseer, that's all. I heard at Stocktown that he'd entered into the service of a lady, a Miss Wallace—"

"Ay, ay, the Queen of the Ranchers."

"I believe that is her title. Anyhow, I am going to see him and offer double his old wages to get him back."

"He must be a good man, stranger."

"He is. I don't know his equal at sheep, and I'm told he's as good at cattle."

"Well, stranger, all I kin say is this. If you kin get him down to Bushwhacker's Creek, you kin keep him, but if ever he comes up here, Tom and me's a-goin' fur him red-hot. Hyar's the old haouse, stranger. Git off yer critter, and step in. The jug's never empty at Fork Ford whether the boss air here or not. Jest now he ain't."

And the hospitable overseer made his guest sit down to a rude but plentiful meal, in which the staples were beef in unlimited quantities, half-baked and unleavened bread for variety, and a large jug of whisky to complete the spread. The stranger set to with a good appetite, and after dinner rode off to the Queen's Ranch.

CHAPTER VI.

THE QUEEN'S RANCH.

THE Queen's Ranch was remarkable in Colorado for more things than one. It was the richest in the State, the only one run by a lady, the only one where they tried to breed thoroughbred horses and cattle exclusively, getting rid of all other stock, and finally, the only one where there was a civilized house, a garden, wheeled vehicles, roads, and a grand piano.

We might say it was the only house where there was any clean linen, but that would be a libel on the rest, for every Colorado man possesses at least one "biled shirt," which he uses on state occasions.

At the Queen's Ranch, however, the men around the house not only wore "biled shirts" daily, but slept on sheets and used tablecloths, while the hostess of the establishment went so far as to indulge in pocket handkerchiefs and table napkins.

These peculiarities would have been deemed frivolous and impudent in a male rancher, but to ladies in Colorado, all things are permissible; and Kate's house was the envy of Christo county. The mistress of the establishment was all the time receiving visitors from the East, among her old school friends; and the ranch generally had anywhere from six to a dozen ladies, who made things lively for the bachelors while on their summer visits, and caused the house to resemble a hotel as long as they were there.

This of itself was a rarity in Colorado cattle-raising districts, where women are rarely seen; where houses are mere huts; where men lead a half-savage life in the open air; where comfort attains its acme in a pipe by the fire after a hard day's riding, and where conversation confines itself to cattle, "roundings up," "brandings," "drives," "yearlings," "Mavericks," and occasional dashes into local politics at election times, for a change.

Kate Wallace, by her pluck and tact, had made a revolution in the society of Christo county, and her house became the rendezvous of many a disconsolate bachelor, who would ride thirty miles to see "the Queen," and have a flirtation with her visitors, to listen to the tones of her piano, and dream of the days when he would be able to return to civilization, as soon as he had made a fortune in cattle-raising or mining.

When Mr. Macdonald of Bushwhacker's Creek rode up to the house, he noted the difference at once from other ranches. The situation was picturesque, and the surroundings pretty and neat. The house stood at the entrance to a lovely valley in the mountains, down which ran Queen's Creek, a pretty mill stream, graced with a water-wheel.

The edifice itself was long and low, stretching over a large expanse of ground, with kitchens and outhouses innumerable, and was surrounded by a veritable flower garden, with a patch of some ten acres fenced in and devoted to vegetables.

The corral, instead of being close to the house to breed flies and bad odors, was removed to a distance, and a huge shed served as the stable for what horses were needed at the house. The quarters and dining hall for the cowboys were

at the other side of this shed, and out of sight of the house, while around this main edifice was a little army of servants, chiefly Mexicans and Indians, at various occupations.

As the rancher rode up to the house he saw quite a group of ladies on the long piazza, and a Mexican came to take his horse and request him to enter, for that "supper was about to be served and there were plenty of rooms at the senor's disposal."

Macdonald, though a man of the world, who had come to Colorado to make money, had become so bashful, following the custom of the country, that he hesitated:

"But I do not know the lady. I have no claim on her hospitality."

"The Queen's Ranch knows no strangers, senor," returned the Mexican politely. "It is the rule of the senora that all travelers shall be treated as guests. The men in the house will attend to the senor's wants. Ho! Tonio, come here. Attend to the senor."

And the astonished and gratified rancher was ushered into the house through a maze of cool corridors, and installed in a comfortable room, with white sheets on the bed, a marble wash-stand with water pipes, a looking glass, and all the conveniences called "modern," which he had never seen elsewhere in the State, save at the city of Denver.

Tonio informed him that supper would be ready in ten minutes, and asked his name, when he vanished, to reappear at the sound of a bell and usher Macdonald into a large cool dining hall, where some thirty people, including a dozen ladies, were seated at small tables in groups, as if in a hotel, every one seeming to be at ease with himself and herself.

Tonio took him to one of the tables, occupied by only three people, with a vacant chair for a fourth, and announced him to a very handsome little lady at the table as:

"El Senor Macdonaldo, senora."

The lady favored him with a glance from her dark eyes that sent a flush over his bronzed face, and said sweetly:

"I hope you will pardon us for so quickly beginning dinner, but I try to make my guests feel as much at home as if at a hotel, and we all suit our own convenience here. Have you ridden far to-day?"

"Only from Bushwhacker's Creek, madam," he said, feeling strangely ill at ease in his rough dress before this lady, who wore a Worth costume of wine-colored velvet and satin, and seemed so much out of place in the rough life of a cattle ranch.

"Ah yes, I heard some one had just bought that ranch, sir. Do you like it?"

"Pretty well, madam. I think I shall be better pleased with it, now that I find I have ladies for neighbors."

"Thank you," she returned tranquilly. "I'm trying to civilize the gentlemen in this part of the country. You know you men are generally sad brutes, and when you have no ladies to keep you in order you are apt to degenerate into savages."

"I'm sure of that," he said stiffly, and feeling that he would have given worlds to be at ease. Yet Macdonald was a Cambridge graduate, who had seen plenty of society.

But life on a ranch among cowboys and shepherds is apt to render a man stiff and awkward before ladies.

"I hope we shall see you often, now we are such near neighbors," she went on. "It's only a morning's ride from the creek, I believe. Ah, pardon me. Miss Nelly Craig, my dearest friend and schoolmate, Mr. Macdonald. Mr. Howe, Mr. Macdonald."

Miss Nelly Craig, a lively blonde, immediately began.

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald, have you been very long in this country? I'm only what they call a tenderfoot yet; but I'm delighted with all I see. Those dear ducks of cowboys! Such lovely riders! just like a circus! I'm awfully in love with them. Are you?"

He could not help laughing, for the girl, being an affected little piece of humanity, did not freeze him like his stately hostess.

"Not in the least, I assure you, nor would you be if you heard them talk—I won't say swear."

"That's what Kate tells me, and why she won't let them come to the house, but I can't believe such handsome fellows can be so wicked. Why, do you know that the overseer, who comes up to report every day, talks as well as you or I do?"

"Indeed?"

"Yes;—and—between you and me, I can't tell why Kate is so severe and rude to him. I'm sure if I were in her position I could hardly help falling in love with him, for he's—oh, so handsome! And do you know what the men call him?"

Macdonald glanced over at Kate Wallace, who seemed to be closely engaged with Mr. Howe, and attending to nothing else.

Mr. Howe had come to Colorado fresh from an Eastern school of mines as a "mining expert," and was always finding veins of gold and silver ore, at which old Colorado men turned up their noses as frauds, stigmatizing the expert as

a "dumb-headed gopher as didn't know beans out of the bag."

Macdonald saw that Kate was not listening, so he said to Miss Craig:

"What do they call him. Is it the Gentle Shepherd?"

She opened her blue eyes wide.

"Why no. His name's Shepherd, to be sure, but they call him Parson Jim. I'm sure he doesn't look the least like a clergyman. But I thought I'd ask the men why they called him parson. You see sometimes I scamper away on horseback to have a talk with them, though Kate gets very mad with me for doing it. But I'm sure they're very polite."

"Of course they are. The cowboy, in his wildest moods, never insults a lady."

"Just what I told Kate, but she says I don't know them. I suppose it's a little different when one pays them and has to make them work. But anyhow I met Pedro the vaquero, they call him,—he only talks broken English—and I asked him why they called Mr. Shepherd Parson Jim. What do you think he told me?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Why he told me that this little innocent man, who looks like a lamb, was the worst and quickest fighter. I don't know what that means—in this part of Colorado; that he had killed—only think of it—killed dead, stone dead, no less than eleven men this year, and that every man on the ranch was afraid of him. Isn't that just too awful for anything? I declare I'm all in a tremble ever since when I see him. But the strange part of it is this—"

Again she sunk her voice to a whisper.

"Do you know that he has made all the men promise not to tell Kate. I don't know why, but she doesn't know in the least what a desperate character he is, and I had to promise Pedro, I wouldn't tell any one, before he let me into the secret."

"Which you seem to have kept in the most punctilious manner," returned the rancher with a smile of amusement. "I am glad, however, that you have told me, as I recognize in the portrait the very man I'm looking for. He used to be in my employment, and from his innocent looks he was nicknamed the Gentle Shepherd, a name that stuck to him till he suddenly, and without a moment's warning, left my service."

"And now you want to get him back," the young lady retorted, with lightning quickness. "Oh I understand you; but you've no sort of chance, I warn you. Kate wouldn't let him go for his weight in gold."

"Who's that you're talking off?" inquired their hostess, turning her head languidly. "I never saw the animal I wouldn't part with for its weight in gold."

"But this is a man," retorted Nelly. "It's little Mr. Shepherd, the overseer."

Kate frowned and said severely:

"I do think, Nelly, we might keep the business of the ranch out of our talk at the table. Shepherd is well enough for an overseer; but I could do without him in future, as I did before he came."

"Then would you part with him?" asked Macdonald, so eagerly that he forgot his civility. "If you would I should be glad to take him off your hands."

She laughed a little sarcastically.

"What, must I reprove you too, for talking shop in social hours? No, sir, if you wish to talk business, I will see you at the office in the morning. Are you fond of music, Mr. Macdonald? Here is my friend, Nelly, a charming musician, a pupil of Errani, of New York. She shall give us some of the latest songs, and make us forget that we are on a cattle ranch. Come, Nellie dear."

And the ladies swept away to the long drawing-room, followed by the men.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OVERSEER.

ANGUS MACDONALD slept well that night, but for the fact that he dreamed constantly, while the subjects of his dreams were ladies with blue eyes, and others with black ones; and these lovely beings were always on horseback, at full speed, while he was chasing them to and fro among the cattle on the ranch.

When he woke in the morning, he went down to take a look at the surroundings of the place before the other guests were awake, and the first person that he saw was his fair hostess, in a plain, strong, brown riding habit, with a broad sombrero on her head, riding away from the house at a hard gallop, on a bay horse whose size and shape showed him to be a thoroughbred.

Angus Macdonald looked round him and saw the Mexican groom, who at once asked him:

"Will the senor ride to-day? The senora likes company on her morning tour of inspection, and the other caballeros from the East do not rise early."

"Get me a horse then," said Angus, and the peon led up a tall bay, ready saddled, on which the rancher was soon galloping after his fair hostess.

She heard him coming, and pulled up to say, smilingly:

"You are welcome. I am going to take my morning rounds, and I have to do it quickly; for we have twenty-five miles to go before breakfast."

"The deuce you have," thought Angus, but he said nothing except:

"Very good, Miss Wallace. It's your horse I'm riding, so I'm not to be held responsible if he drops dead."

"He won't drop dead. These horses of mine are thorough-breds. It costs no more to raise them than it does to breed bronchos; and they can go! Come on! Let's see what you're made of!"

And away they went at a wild gallop, in which they passed over hill and dale, dashed through brooks and out into green savannas, covered with cattle; passed cowboys sitting lazily on their horses watching the cattle drink, and finally emerged at the line of mounted herdsmen, which told them they had reached the confines of Fork Ford Ranch.

Here Kate pulled up to walk her foaming horse, and inquired:

"Do you know Mr. Carroll, of Fork Ford? That is his ranch."

"Only by sight. I've seen him once or twice at Stocktown. He doesn't live here much, does he?"

"No. He's one of those cattle gentlemen who are ashamed of the business, except that it gives them money to spend. I like Colorado myself, wild as it is."

"I don't wonder, madam, after seeing your house, but we poor, lonely bachelors, are different. There is Pacheco, now—"

She interrupted him suddenly by saying sharply:

"Sir, do you not know that his name is never mentioned to me?"

"I beg your pardon. No. I have only just moved down into this neighborhood, you know. I was not aware there was any trouble."

"Trouble?" she repeated, disdainfully. "No, there's no trouble. I am a woman and he is a man, so we cannot fight, but for all that, if Luis Pacheco values his life he'll stay away from the Ten League Ranch as long as I'm here. I don't quarrel with cowboys."

Macdonald was puzzled, for he knew nothing of the past history of the Queen Ranch, and to him Pacheco, when he had met him at the cattle exchange, had always seemed a pleasant, rollicking sort of fellow, whose only faults were a passion for whisky and gambling.

But he had too much tact to ask any questions on a disagreeable subject, and turned the conversation by saying:

"By the by, do you ever talk business in the morning?"

She smiled brightly at him.

"Certainly. This is the time for it. Did you come here on business?"

"I did. First, I want to buy some of your pure stock to improve my herds. I believe in the advantages of it, and I find my cattle run down to a collection of scrubby beasts, not worth ten dollars a head. Will you sell me any?"

"Certainly, if you are willing to pay the price. You can settle that with my overseer. I believe he has some few horses he can spare, too, if you wish to go into that. We shall meet him as we ride home."

"Thank you. Ah, by the by, have you had him long, Miss Wallace?"

"About three months," she said shortly.

"Are you satisfied with him?"

"As well as with any of them. He has the merit of being a man of education, so he does not offend me by bad language; but to compensate for that he is a conceited jackanapes."

She looked angry as she spoke, and Macdonald observed:

"Then I suppose you'd have no great objection to parting with him?"

She flashed a keen, business look at him as she answered:

"That depends. If you want him, you have your reasons, I suppose, and he may be more valuable than I think."

"I do want him," said Macdonald, quite frankly. "He was once in my own employment. Did you know it?"

"No."

She looked unaffectedly surprised, and added:

"He came to me entirely unrecommended, and I very soon promoted him, for the single reason that he didn't drink, and was intelligent. I never asked where he came from."

"And your former overseer?"

"Oh, he was shot," she returned, in the most matter-of-fact way. "He was foolish enough to get into a quarrel at Sangre Christo ford, with one of the men of the Blossom drive, and the first thing I knew I had a message that my herd was going to pieces for want of a head to it. So I appointed Shepherd at once, and staid with him myself for fear he might not be able to enforce order alone. I must say he had a very persuasive way with the men, and they seem to obey him wonderfully well, considering that he neither swears, shoots, nor fights. I don't know how he does, but I can't help feeling a sort of contempt for him, in spite of his success."

"Contempt?" echoed Macdonald. "Why?"

"On, he's so effeminate-looking. I like a man to look like a man, and I'm afraid all the time that some of my wild fellows will break out and get to drinking when his authority will be scattered to the winds."

Macdonald smiled slightly.

"Do you think so? Perhaps you don't know him as well as I do."

She flashed a side glance at him, and compressed her lips as she said:

"Perhaps not. I've no curiosity."

"But perhaps you mistake him and his character. Would you not like to hear how I first met him?"

"Certainly, if you are anxious to tell it, Mr. Macdonald."

The perverse beauty was determined not to ask the questions she would willingly have heard answered, and he saw through it, as he retorted:

"I am never anxious to force information on any one. Let it pass. If you think so meanly of him, you can hardly wish to keep him. I came here to ask you if you would let him go. I have an excellent overseer, Joel Brunton, a man you probably know, and have no need to change as far as my business is concerned; but I want to get Shepherd back, simply because he is the only man I ever met on the cattle ranges of whom I could make a companion without fear that he would overstep the bounds of respect. Will you let him go and take Joel Brunton in exchange?"

"No, I won't," she retorted, dryly. "If he's worth anything to you, he's worth as much to me, and I'm going to keep him. You seem to believe in him."

"I do. Are you aware that he was about to graduate from Harvard College when he came here?"

"Was he? Well, there are plenty of men of that sort in Colorado, and they are generally too full of airs to get on. I suppose he had to leave on account of some trouble in college?"

"No. It was his health broke down, and he had the courage to give up home to regain his bodily strength."

"He has not much of that, I should say, Mr. Macdonald."

"Don't you be too sure of that. He is what the cowboys call a deceiving man. When I first saw him, two years ago, he was just what he looks now, but he was not fit for any duties but those of a quiet shepherd. Yet, in a year from that time, the same man could run twenty miles in two hours, turn fifty handsprings successively, and had increased his chest girth by three inches, simply because he knew how to cultivate his body and gave his mind to nothing else, like the late Doctor Winship in the same college. It was then I first began to notice him, and found that the shepherds were afraid of him. Since that time he has kept on in the same way, I believe, though I could never find out much. I made him my overseer, and never had a better one, until he left me without a moment's warning, just after I sold out my sheep and bought Bushwhacker's. I didn't even see him, or he should not have gone. He left only this letter."

He pulled from his pocket a letter, which he handed her, and which she read without thinking. It ran:

"DEAR MR. MACDONALD:—

"After your many kindnesses to me, I regret to be obliged to seem discourteous in leaving you at a moment's notice; but if you knew all the circumstances in the case you would not blame me. I have work to do which must be done, and I cannot do it while in your service. I came to Colorado to enter the cattle trade, and now I have learned it, I am going to show some people in this country that brains are worth something even among the firmest believers in physical strength."

"For you, who have always treated me as a gentleman, I shall ever retain the warmest respect and affection, and hope to meet you again in happier times. Yours very truly, J. A. SHEPHERD."

"And that is all," said Macdonald as she handed him back the letter.

Kate Wallace whipped her horse and started on another wild breakneck gallop, as if she wished to avoid conversation on the subject, so that the rancher took the hint and dropped it, till they came near the house once more and found every one up, while the very man about whom they had been speaking, was standing in front of the office, the bridle of his horse resting on his arm, as he waited for the coming of his imperious young mistress.

Macdonald sprung from his horse and assisted her to alight, when she made an imperious signal to her overseer, and walked into the office, into which she was followed by Macdonald.

As soon as she arrived in the office, she said to Shepherd sharply:

"Shut the door."

He obeyed without noticing her rude manner, and Macdonald, as if he felt anxious to contrast his own kindness to the overseer with the apparently capricious harshness of the lady, said cordially:

"Why, Shepherd, I'm exceedingly glad to see you here. How have you been since you left me so unceremoniously? I've not known what to do without you at the ranch and I've

been begging Miss Wallace to let me have you back."

Here the heiress slapped the table with her riding whip and said coldly:

"Mr. Shepherd can please himself as to that. If he wishes to leave me, he can go this morning. There are plenty of men in the market."

The little overseer had removed his hat and stood there, eying his mistress with the same faint smile he always wore. In his usual smooth tones he added:

"When I entered Miss Wallace's service, I did so deliberately. If she wishes me to leave it, she has only to say so. I have never hitherto disobeyed her orders."

She cast a sidelong glance of triumph at Macdonald as she answered:

"I am perfectly indifferent whether you go or stay. When I wish you to go, I shall say so plainly. Have you any offer to make to him, Mr. Macdonald? If you have, make it freely. I tell you it is a matter of indifference to me."

Macdonald hesitated and stammered at this refreshing frankness

"I should like to get him back, madam, but I don't wish to disoblige you. I'll give you Joel Brunton, who is very anxious to be in your service, and I offer Mr. Shepherd twice what he now gets from you, whatever it be, and a tenth share in the increase of my herds."

Kate gave a nervous slap to the table and retorted:

"I make no such offer. On the contrary, I am going to cut down my expenses. I shall cut down salaries ten per cent. next month, including Mr. Shepherd's wages. Now, sir, do you wish to go?"

Shepherd shook his head.

"I have already told you that I do not intend to leave your service, unless you discharge me," he answered.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOMAN'S CAPRICES.

KATE WALLACE turned to Macdonald with a charming smile, saying:

"You can see how it is, I should like to oblige you very much indeed, but I can't actually discharge the man, as long as he is respectful and obedient. I knew you couldn't get him away from me. My men never leave me unless I turn them out, which I only do when they forget their place."

There was a brilliant color in her cheek, a happy look in her eyes, as she said this, and she went on to Shepherd, in a tone of less harshness than she had hitherto shown:

"Mr. Macdonald wishes to buy some fine stock, Shepherd: have we any to spare?"

"Not except as a favor, madam. If we are to improve the herd to the proper point, as I suggested might be—"

"There, there, that'll do, Shepherd," she interrupted peremptorily. "I don't allow my servants to make suggestions. You will sell Mr. Macdonald whatever he needs at current prices. I'm running this ranch."

She seemed to take pleasure in treating the man like an ignorant baby, and Macdonald looked curiously at him. He felt that, under such treatment, he, Angus Macdonald, must inevitably have exploded in a rage and thrown up his situation.

But Shepherd's face only wore a sort of half smile as he answered:

"Very good, madam. Your orders shall be obeyed *au pied de la lettre*."

She started slightly, and her face flushed, as she observed to Macdonald:

"What an appetite that ride gives one. Come; let's to breakfast. Jim, you wait till we've had breakfast. I'll send you word when I want you."

And she sprung up, ran her arm into that of Macdonald, and tripped out of the room to meet her guests, as if no such person as James Shepherd had been in existence.

As for Macdonald, he couldn't help saying, as he went to the house:

"I beg your pardon, but—but do you treat all your men like that?"

"Like what?" she asked gayly.

"So sharply. Honestly, I should not dare to do it. I should lose every man I have on the ranch."

She laughed lightly.

"Oh, that's my way. They like it, or they wouldn't stay as they do. Besides, that fellow deserves it for his impudence."

"Impudence?" echoed Macdonald, puzzled.

"Yes, impudence. How dare he quote Latin to a lady!"

"That wasn't Latin: it was French," the rancher said innocently; for it had never occurred to him as a possibility that his brilliant young hostess might be only partially educated.

Kate tossed her head angrily.

"Latin or French, it's all one. I don't like the man; and if he wants to stay I'll make his place miserable for him. But here's Nelly; come in."

And they went to breakfast, over which they dawdled a long time, till the young rancher excused himself and went out to the office, where he found Shepherd sitting quietly in an arm-

chair, with a bush cigarette between his lips, puffing tranquilly away.

"God bless my soul, Shepherd," he exclaimed. "Have they kept you waiting all this time? It's an infernal shame! Why don't you leave this woman's service, when she seems to delight in treating you like a dog, with her half-educated insolence and purse-proud scorn? Did I ever treat you so?"

Shepherd smiled tranquilly.

"No, you never did. I shouldn't have stood it in the first place, and you couldn't have done it in the second."

"Then why the deuce don't you take my offer and leave her? See here, my dear fellow, I came here nearly as poor as you, but made my brains tell on shares with another man. I want to give you a chance. Why do you stay with this woman?"

"You forget," answered Shepherd, "that she is a woman, and does not mean half she says. I've made up my mind to stay, and she's made up her mind to drive me out or—something else. I can always turn the tables on her at a moment's notice, and she'll end in getting afraid of me."

"How do you do it?"

"Never mind. I have my secret. Did you really come here to get me back? I'm sure I'm very grateful, but the fact is, I have made up my mind to stay here till I have met a certain person."

"Ah, indeed!" said Macdonald, starting, "and are you watching for some one. There are men watching for you, too, I can tell you, and dangerous ones too. I heard it on the way here. A man called Bill Travers, at Fork Ford, and another named Tom Johnson—why, what's the matter?"

Shepherd's usually serene, placid face had suddenly grown pale as death and savage-looking; but he only said:

"Oh nothing, nothing. You say Bill Travers and Tom Johnson are watching for me? Why don't they come here?"

"They didn't know you were here till I mentioned it."

"Did you see Tom Johnson?" asked the little man.

"No, no. I saw only Travers. He has heard some wonderful stories of you, and says he's crazy to fight you. If I were you, I would keep out of his way. He's a huge fellow, and you're only a little man, if you are plucky."

Shepherd nodded slightly and began to pat the floor impatiently with his foot, saying:

"I wish she'd come in. I'm getting tired of waiting. I've half a mind—"

He was gazing out frowningly, when his mistress came in and said:

"How dare you smoke here, sir? Take that cigarette away at once and don't venture to repeat this insolence."

Shepherd's mouth twitched for a moment as if he were almost angry, but he made no answer, save to throw the cigarette out of the window, and the lady took her seat and began to ask all sorts of questions about the ranch, displaying a good deal of practical perception, but framing her questions in such a deliberately insolent manner that Macdonald, who had been charmed with her the night before, now actually began to hate this woman, who seemed trying by every means she had in her power to badger and insult a man in her service, whom Macdonald knew to be a gentle, well-educated person, of unusual ability, able to hold his own in any society, while the Colorado beauty was decidedly rough and unpolished, save for the thin veneer that a few years in the East had spread over her speech.

At last the examination was over, and the lady abruptly concluded:

"That'll do, Jim. You can go. Show Mr. Macdonald what he wants, and I will see if you know any thing about prices. Submit the list to me to-night at your evening report."

Then, to Macdonald, with a sweet smile:

"We can't possibly let you go under a week. You'll stay, won't you?"

"Thank you," he responded, a little stiffly, "I'm afraid I shall be wanted at home."

"Oh, no," she persisted, "you have a very fine overseer, I know, in Joel Brunton. I wish I had him myself. He can be trusted alone, can be not?"

"I hope so, madam, just as I am sure you can trust your own."

"I don't know that, sir. I never trust any man till I know him thoroughly. What's the matter, Shepherd? Did you hear me tell you to go?"

"I was waiting for Mr. Macdonald, madam," he answered, quietly, not noticing her rude tone.

"Then wait outside," she retorted, not turning her head to look at him, and with that the little overseer turned on his heel and went out, while Macdonald sat mute with amazement at her persistent insolence, and too much incensed at it to do any thing but frown and drum on the table. As soon as the overseer was gone, she altered her tone and manner to one of confidence and flattery, as she said:

"I know you must think me very harsh, Mr. Macdonald, but all my men are used to my

ways and do not mind them. To you, of course, I am different. But I want to let you see that you cannot coax away an overseer of mine. I give you leave to try any argument you like. You cannot get him. Well, it's time I went to the house. My guests will be wondering what has become of me. I shall expect you to dinner. Good-by."

She waved him an adieu, and was off, leaving him in a state of wonder and doubt as to what this singularly unconventional young woman could possibly mean.

When he went outside, he found Shepherd seated on a block of stone, tranquilly awaiting his appearance, the bridle of his horse thrown over his arm, smoking another cigarette.

"Well," he said, touching the overseer on the shoulder. "I see you're smoking. I wonder that little spit-fire did not forbid you again."

Shepherd turned his head and favored him with a rather mocking smile as he answered him:

"Mr. Macdonald, did you ever hear of the fate of the man who jumped at a conclusion too fast? Well, he fell into a mistake. Don't imitate his example. Miss Wallace has a right to order me about if she likes, and if I don't resent it, I don't see why any one else should be aggrieved. How much stock do you want, and of what kind? I am ready to go with you."

Macdonald saw that, for some reason, the other was determined to keep him on a strict business footing, and to repel any familiarity with which they had formerly met; so he shrugged his shoulders and turned to business topics, in which they consumed several hours, till the rancher was ready to go home, when he said, carelessly:

"Ah, by-the-by, Shepherd, do you know if there is any bad blood between Miss Wallace and Pacheco, the owner of the Ten League Ranch? I mentioned his name to her by accident this morning and she gave me a regular setting down about it."

Shepherd nodded gloomily.

"Of course she did. Don't you know?"

"Kow what?"

"Why, Pacheco's men killed her father, four years ago."

"Indeed? Who did it?"

"I don't know; it was one of those things that are difficult to find out. It was a dispute about stray cattle at the time of the fall branding, or on the drive to market in spring—I don't know which—but anyway there was a regular duel, six on a side, and Colonel Wallace was killed in the affray. Our men never go near the Ten League, for fear the old bad blood should break out again. It's the order of Miss Wallace. She's a very sensible woman after all, as you will find out some day, with all her little flights of temper."

Macdonald was surprised. This man, whom he had seen treated by the capricious little heiress with the utmost contumely and contempt, was talking about her with a quiet, grave, half-affectionate tone, as if he really liked her.

"Sensible, is she?" he remarked. "That is the last adjective I should have thought of applying to her, though I admit she is very quick of perception. But don't you ever have trouble with these Ten Leaguers, in spite of orders?"

"It's pretty hard to keep the men out of trouble," was the answer. "They seem to have had a sincere affection for their old employer, which they have transferred to his daughter; and, if left to their own devices, would soon enlarge the feud between the two ranches. But it is my business to keep them away, and I do it. By-the-by, you told me that two men were looking for me. Did they say what they proposed to do?"

He spoke in his usual quiet tone, and Macdonald told him of Travers's threat to slaughter any of the Queen's Ranch cattle that strayed into Fork Ford farm.

Shepherd nodded and observed:

"All right. I think I'll pay the gentleman a little visit and explain matters. There is no reason why we should quarrel. You'll not want me again to-day, I suppose. Good-by."

Then he lifted his broad hat in a grave, ceremonious fashion, and rode off, while Macdonald went to the house to see his hostess, and ask her to ratify his bargain with the overseer. He found her unusually quiet and not in the least inclined to be unreasonable, for the fact was that Shepherd had dealt to the best advantage possible, and his mistress had no excuse to disapprove of the prices at which he had sold the stock, so that the business was soon arranged, and then she asked:

"Where did Shepherd go, by-the-by?"

"I fancy to Fork Ford Ranch," he answered rather uneasily; "the overseer there, Travers, wants to pick a quarrel with him, too, but I had no power to stop him. He said he had gone to explain matters to Travers."

CHAPTER IX.

PARSON JIM.

AFTER the departure of his visitor from Bushwhacker's Creek, Mr. William Travers had been cogitating deeply over the news brought to him of the identity of Miss Wallace's new overseer

with the famous "Gentle Shepherd," and he had been planning all sorts of ways to coax that personage into a fight in which all the advantages should be on the side of Travers himself.

With that object in view he rode over to the Ten League ranch to see his friend Tom Johnson, but found that gentleman busied with his employer, Mr. Pacheco, who had come down to the ranch for a flying visit to see about selling some stock to pay off a poker debt incurred by Pacheco in Denver.

Mr. Travers was consequently unable to talk fight for that day, and could only pass an invitation to his crony to see him next day.

When the next day came Johnson was there, true to appointment, and Travers told him that he had "found the Gentle Shepherd."

He expected to see Tom explode immediately in a volley of oaths; but to his surprise his friend was silent for awhile, and when he did speak it was to ask, in a hesitating, uneasy way:

"Are you sure it's the same cuss, Bill?"

"Sure. In course. Warn't it his old boss told me?"

"And you say he's on the Queen Ranch for sure?"

"So Macdonald says."

"Then the Ten Leaguers can't teach him, Billy boy. Boss Pacheco wouldn't let us."

"Wouldn't, hey? Why not?"

"The old sore, Billy. Ye know 'twere Boss Pacheco himself killed the old man Wallace; and he wouldn't see the darter hurt by one of us for a million of dollars."

"Oh, Hancock and Adams! That's a doddered shame, Tom. But thur ain't no need of our goin' on the Queen Ranch. We kin coax 'em on ours. S'pose we go to killin' that strays."

"They'll kill ourn then, I reckon."

"Thar's more of theirs, so they'll be to come to us."

"It'll be to be done at Fork Ford, I tell ya. Boss Pacheco he's a curis feller, and every time he hears that place called the Queen's Ranch it seems to make him feel bad. Never seen a man like him 'bout droppin' another. Lordy, Bill, you and me, we don't keer, we don't, fur a stiff or two."

"You bet we don't. Waal, tell ye what I'll do, Tom. I'll do the killin' over hyar, and ef the Gentle Shepherd comes over to pick a muss, you get your boys ready, as soon as you hear the firing, and come down to help. Thar's a hull grist of fellers at the Queen's."

"I'll be ready. Ef they comes on you run and kinder draw 'em over my way. We've got seventy men on the Ten League."

"And we've forty-eight. But thar's more'n a hundred and fifty of them doddered Queen's men, if they comes in a body."

"They won't, I reckon. Anyway, if we clean out the Shepherd, that's all we want, so good-by, Billy."

And Mr. Johnson rode away, utterly disregarding the entreaty of Bill to "leave him a lock of his hair," while Mr. Travers said to himself:

"What's come over Tom to-day? I 'ob'lieve he's gittin' skeart of the Gentle Shepherd. He wants we-'uns to do all the fightin'."

He had noticed that Tom's eye was wandering uneasily about, from the moment he heard of the advent of the Gentle Shepherd and Bill was only set the more firmly on proving his own prowess alone.

So Mr. Travers saddled up and rode off to the confines of Fork Ford, for the express purpose of looking for strays from the Queen's Ranch, and shooting such down on the spot, an act of incivility certain to provoke an angry retaliation from the cowboys of the Queen's Ranch.

Mr. Travers had not far to go that day, as it happened, before he found an opportunity to execute his purpose; for a fine, handsome, young Durham steer, with the Queen's Ranch brand on his haunch, came trotting over the boundary between the two farms as soon as he arrived at the line. One of the Queen's Ranch cowboys had been past that spot on his rounds, and had his back turned, when Travers deliberately rode up to the steer and shot it, with a bullet from one of his revolvers.

Of course the sound of the shot had the effect of turning the cowboy, who came galloping up, and asked:

"What'n thunder did ye do that fur, Bill Travers? You'll hev to pay fur it."

"No, I won't hev to pay fur it, nuther," was the aggressive reply. "Ef you think you kin make me, why, jest trot out your weepins, young feller."

The cowboy—it was Charley Brown—looked him in the eye, amazed.

"What? Do you want to pick a muss with me, Bill Travers?"

"You bet," was the laconic reply, as Bill drew his pistol.

"Then ye can't do it," said Charley, in a grave tone. "I ain't on the fight, I ain't, Billy, no more. None of us is. We've hired out all our fittin'."

"Hired it out? Who to?" asked Bill, quite taken off his guard at the tone of the other.

"To Parson Jim," was the reply. "I'm a-goin' to tell him, Billy, and if he don't make you

pay fur that steer, you're a better man than I take you to be."

Bill Travers put back his pistol, and saw Charley Brown ride away.

He watched him on his rounds, saw him speak to several cowboys, who all came riding toward the place; and Mr. Travers, fully expecting that the time had arrived for a general free fight, turned away to summon his own followers to the gathering.

In this he had no difficulty, but when he came back near the carcass of the dead steer, with some twenty men at his back, more than fifty of the Queen's Ranch men had assembled inside the boundaries of their own land, and were regarding him with curious silence, in a way that portended mischief.

Bill Travers turned to his men, who seemed to be getting unsteady from the odds opposed to them, and said:

"We've got h-lp comin', boys. Make a runnin' fight of it. Tom Johnson has promised to bring the Ten Leaguers as soon as he hears the shots. We've got them daisies whar we want 'em, and don't you forget it."

Then one of the men answered:

"It's all very well fur you, Bill Bounce, but I don't see what were the use of bringin' on a muss with the Queen's men. We hain't no quar'l with 'em."

Bill Travers turned on him scornfully:

"Be you afeard, Conky Joe? Ef ye be, go to hum, and git under the blankets. D'y'e know who's overseer on the Queen's now? It's that ere Gentle Shepherd as we've heern tell so much on, an' I'm a-goin' to wipe him out, or he's a-goin' to wipe me out. So thar."

But, a good deal to Bill's chagrin, the mention of the Gentle Shepherd's name produced exactly the opposite effect on his hearers to what he had anticipated. Instead of being nerved up to the fight, they seemed to be utterly demoralized, and Scarface Jake, who was one of the party, cried out:

"Jumpin' Jehoshaphat, boys! git! This ain't none of our funeral. Let Bill Travers play a lone hand, by the eturnal."

And with that Jake turned his pony and rode off to his post, followed by more than half Bill's party, just as they saw a single horseman come up to the Queen's Ranchmen at a gallop.

Bill Travers looked after his departing men with a bitter scowl and said to the eight who remained:

"You kin go too, ef ye want, boys. I don't ax no man to take up my quar'l. I'm a-gwine to see the Gentle Shepherd, and find what he's made of, I am. Ef you skeered on him, git!"

Four more men rode off at the desired permission, and Bill was left with only four followers, to brave the wrath of fifty armed horsemen, as he supposed.

Then it was that one might see the test of courage. Bill Travers never flinched, nor did one of his four men. They pulled out their pistols, looked to the locks, replaced them in their belts, and one or two dismounted to girth their saddles a little tighter before remounting again.

Bill looked at his four men in a critical manner. One of them was a short, square-built French Canadian, called Pierre DuLong, nicknamed, as usual, "Perera Pete." One was a solemn, stolid-looking Indian of the Cherokee Nation, Tom Ross, always called "Injun Tom." The third was a dried-up little man, with a weazened face and a wild wandering eye, generally supposed to be half crazy, and rejoicing in the appellation of "Tim the Snipe." The fourth was a gaunt, black-muzzled fellow of large size, whose real name was Owen Mackenzie, but who was known to the cowboys only as "Black Owen."

These four men were none of them quarrelsome in temperament, and, if left to himself, were the last Bill would have thought of in an emergency; but as he looked over them he saw that they were all of the kind that would "stick" to the last, and he began to feel that exultation of spirit which comes on a brave man when he faces peril, that he knows to be overwhelming, with a determination to die with honor; for Bill Travers never expected to get out of the trouble alive. He had brought it on himself by his own rashness, and every one but the four had deserted him.

He looked to his pistols, and reloaded the chamber that had caused all the disturbance, then took his stand by the slaughtered steer, saying:

"This here's our beef, boys, and I'm a-gwine to hev it fur supper or die by it. Git off yer critters."

They got off their ponies and took their stand by the dead steer, to watch the Queen's Ranchers, who had been joined by the strange horseman.

As they looked, they saw the whole band break up and disperse at a gallop, each man to his station, leaving a single horseman behind, who slowly walked his horse toward the dead steer.

Bill scratched his head.

"What does that mean?" he muttered.

He climbed on his pony again and rode out to meet the other man. It looked as if the stranger was willing to trust matters to a duel between

two, and Bill was well content to have it so; though the voluntary surrender of advantage by the stranger compelled a certain respect from the reckless cowboy, in spite of himself.

He left his four followers by the dead steer, and pretty soon encountered the stranger, at whom he stared with a mixture of curiosity and jealousy he could not conceal.

The approaching horseman was a little man, with long fair curls arranged in ringlets, a beardless face, and a dress that Bill had never seen except on the richest of Mexican horse-tamers, with velvet, gold lace, silver buttons, and a gold-handled whip that made him look like a play-actor.

Mr. Travers stopped his horse before the stranger, a pistol in his hand, hanging down by his right thigh, and demanded, with a regular fighting scowl:

"Waal, stranger, what is it?"

The little stranger lifted his hand to his sombrero and swept it down in a ceremonious obeisance, replying:

"I suppose I have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Travers."

"I'm Bill Travers. What is it?" grunted Bill.

"Is Mr. Carroll, your employer, at home?" asked the stranger suavely.

"No, he ain't. I'm boss while he's away. Who in thunder air you?" retorted Bill, cocking his pistol audibly. "You're on our land. What d'ye come fur? A muss, is it? Gawl darn ye, ye'll git all ye want hyar. I'm Bill Travers, that's who I am. Now who be you?"

The stranger smiled as serenely as ever, observing jocularly:

"Well, well, I've heard of you before. In fact I remember having seen you a couple of years ago, when you stood between me and death. You and I cannot quarrel, Mr. Travers. I owe you a good deal."

Bill Travers eyed him frowningly, and the little man continued:

"Why, don't you remember me?"

"No, I don't, and I don't want no sorter palaverin'. D'y'e mean fight or not? Who be ye?"

"Well," returned the stranger, smiling, "I have so many names since I came to Colorado that I've almost forgotten my own. The men on the Queen's Ranch call me Parson Jim, and—"

"So you be Parson Jim, be ye?" retorted Bill, sarcastically. "D'y'e know what one of your men told me 'bout you?"

"No disrespect, I hope?"

"He told me as how your gang had hired out their fighting to you. Be that so?"

"Well, as a matter of fact I think I may say they have," returned Parson Jim quietly.

Bill stared at him hard.

"And you mean to say you're a fighter?" he asked half incredulously, for the little man offered not the slightest evidence of an intention to touch his weapons, though he had no less than four very richly mounted revolvers in his sash.

Parson Jim smiled.

"Oh no, quite the reverse. I am a man who wishes to get on without quarreling if he can, but who intends to have his rights. I observe that you have shot one of our steers, and I am informed that you wished to fight one of our men, who came over to ask you the reason you had for killing an inoffensive beast. Do you think you did exactly right, Mr. Travers, in shooting that steer? I put it to you as a gentleman."

Bill Travers was amazed and almost confounded at the reasonable tone of the stranger. He had expected a fight, and here was a man who made him feel he had done a bad action.

But he hardened his heart to say:

"I ain't on the talk, stranger, to-day. I shot the steer on my boss's place, and we're gwine to hev beef fur supper at Fork Ford. Now then, what air you gwine to do about it?"

"In that case," returned Parson Jim in a matter of fact way, "your boss will have to pay for the animal, that's all. I don't fight about trifles. Good-day."

CHAPTER X. THE WHIP DUEL.

As he spoke, Parson Jim raised his sombrero and turned his horse to ride away, when Bill Travers burst into a contemptuous laugh:

"Took water, by gum! Waal, I thought you was a fighter. Shucks and molasses! And that's your Gentle Shepherd, is it?"

The little man instantly wheeled his horse, and his face became grave, as he said firmly:

"My friend, you really appear to want to pick a quarrel with me."

"That's jest it, parson," cried Bill, in a tone of delight. "Be you really the Gentle Shepherd, as cleaned out Scarfaced Jake and Ike Collins? If you be, you're my mutton, and don't you forget it."

Parson Jim rode up close to him, under the threatening muzzle of Bill's pistol, to say to him, still more gravely:

"My friend, I don't want to have any difficulty with you. I know you to be a brave man, and as I never fight but what I kill my man, I don't want to kill you. You shot that

steer to try and provoke me. It does not hurt me a bit. It belongs to Miss Wallace, and as soon as Mr. Carroll hears of it, he will pay for it, and probably send you away."

Bill started.

"Why, ye dodrotted, mean little skunk, would you go tattling to a man's boss?"

"Not on my own quarrel, of course; but this is Miss Wallace's loss. If I'd shot one of your steers, wouldn't you have gone to Miss Wallace?"

"No, by gum!"

"What would you have done then?"

"I'd have jest gone fur you, and ef you hadn't paid fur it, you and me would have had the liveliest little muss you ever seen, stranger."

Parson Jim nodded.

"I see. Well, you and I are different. I don't fight about money matters. But you said something to me just now that sounded very much like a threat. You asked if I were the Gentle Shepherd? That is what I used to be called, once on a time. You said I was your mutton? What did you mean?"

Bill stared wide-eyed at the little stranger, who talked this way under the muzzle of a pistol.

"What did I mean?" he asked. "Why I meant that one of us two had to be wiped out to-day, and I reckon it ain't me, stranger. I've got ye covered."

"And you call yourself a brave man?" said the stranger, quietly. "Not satisfied with weighing fifty pounds more than I do, you are afraid to give me a chance to draw a pistol, are you?"

Bill instantly lowered his pistol.

"No, I ain't," he said. "Get out yer weepins. I'll fight ye fair."

Parson Jim smiled.

"I thought you only needed a little plain speaking to understand. See here, are you set on fighting me to-day?"

"I am jest that, stranger."

"Very well, then. How will you have it? Pistols, quirks, or rough and tumble?"

Bill stared.

"Rough and tumble? You? Why, air ye crazy? I could j-st eat ye up at that. No, no, I'll give ye yer choice. I don't want to be hoggish."

"Very well," answered Parson Jim. "I won't say pistols, because you'd have no chance with me. Look here."

As he spoke he leveled a derringer at Bill's head. Where it came from the cowboy could not tell, but Parson Jim continued:

"You thought you had me covered just now, and did not know that your life was at my mercy. Now I'm going to show you a little trick in shooting. You see that steer? I'll let you fire one shot at it, and then I'll draw. I'll let you the price of the steer I put my six bullets into a smaller ring than yours, and that you fire at least one shot after I do, though I draw my pistol last. Is it done?"

"D-nel! You bet! Stranger, ef you kin do that, I knock under in shootin'. But whar 'n thunder did that derringer come from?"

"I had it in my hand all the time. Are you ready? Fire away! I shall put all my shots into the back of the steer's head as he lies. So!"

Bill Travers fired away five shots as fast as he could, as the stranger drew from his belt a revolver and sent six more as rapidly as the eye could wink. As Bill took aim for his last, Parson Jim laid his hand on his arm and said:

"Don't fire. See, I've beaten you on the time test. Now come and look for the bullet. If you want to fight me after that—why, I'll try you."

A little puzzled and uneasy at the tone of this confident stranger, Bill rode over to the carcass of the steer, and Parson Jim pointed out five bullet-holes, all in the body of the animal, from which the blood oozed.

"There," he said, "are your bullets, a good yard apart. Now look for mine. Yours is a forty-five caliber Colt. I have a thirty-eight self-cocker. You'll find all my bullets between his horns."

"Look, you, Injun Tom," said Bill, in a rather subdued way. "See ef it's so."

Injun Tom did as he was bid, and grunted out:

"Big hole—all in it. See."

He stuck in his forefinger and hooked out a bullet somewhat shattered and flattened, but easily recognizable as a thirty-eight caliber, and handed it up to Bill, who looked at it amazedly, and said, soberly:

"Stranger, I knock under. You beat Old Scratch at shooting, you do."

Parson Jim laughed.

"Oh, that's nothing. See here. C-tany dollars about you? Throw them up. I'll give you five dollars for every one I miss, so long as you throw them fair. If I hit them they're mine. Is that a fair bet?"

"Five to one, eh? I reckon I'll not take it," returned Bill, cautiously, adding:

"I'll throw up tips fur ye, at five dollars a miss, but that's all I kin afford to risk."

"Very well; out with them," returned the other drawing a second revolver, as Bill dived into his pockets for some nickel five-cent pieces, which he spun into the air, one after the other.

Parson Jim fired six shots, and sent a coin flying with each, then turned to Bill with a smile, saying:

"Now you see why I took your pistol so coolly. Do you want me to fight you still, when I say I've no quarrel with you?"

Bill shook his head.

"Not with weepins. I wouldn't stand no sorter chance, stranger."

Parson Jim laughed.

"Very well. I'll take them all off, for your especial benefit. Can you fight with a quirt? I'll take you there, too."

Bill's face lighted up.

"Now you've got me whar I live," he said exultingly. "Big or little, I never seen the man yet I couldn't lick all to smash with a quirt. See hyar, little Parson, you're a main good shot; but don't ye go to fightin' me with no quirts, or I'll cut your heart out."

"Enough said," returned Parson Jim; and as he spoke he threw down his pistols on the grass, with a generous reliance on his opponent's honor that can only be found in the Western cowboy who knows his foe to be a "good man."

Bill Travers followed his example and called out:

"How'll ye take it, a-bossback or afoot?"

"On horseback first. On foot after that, if you beg," said the parson, and as he spoke he threw off his velvet jacket and white ruffl'd shirt, till he was stripped to the waist, revealing a body by no means that of a small man, though he was short of stature, for the chest was well arched and deep, while the beautifully modeled muscles showed him to be remarkably strong for his size.

Bill Travers had stripped too and looked like a giant beside him, as the two men rode out to fight their singular duel, very rare even among cowboys.

They were to attack each other with their long whips or quirts till one or the other cried "enough" and gave in. The duel was to begin on horseback, and be carried on afterward afoot.

Bill Travers had a black broncho, while Parson Jim rode a bay horse whose slim build showed him to be thoroughbred.

"Are you ready?" cried the parson.

"Go," replied Bill, and with that he dashed in his spurs and rode at his foe, who met him half-way, when the strokes began to fly, the long whips writhing in the air like snakes and parrying each other's blows.

The two horses circled round each other, the men lashing. Bill Travers with nervous force, the parson letting out his lash from below, so as to meet the opposing thong every time. All of a sudden, with a turn of his wrist, he managed to get in a light slash of the end of the quirt on Bill Travers's ribs, and the giant uttered a curse of pain and anger, while a great red patch appeared in the place where the lash struck.

Bill dashed in to close by main force and wring his puny antagonist out of the saddle, when Parson Jim suddenly darted away, as if courting a chase, and coaxed his foe to follow.

Bill, forgetting the disproportion in weight, eagerly chased him to no avail, till Shepherd allowed the black to come within striking distance, when he leaned back and flattered a lash on the horse's nose, which instantly stopped it, nearly throwing Bill to the ground, when the animal wheeled round and fled.

Parson Jim turned, too, and was able to discharge a full blow on Bill's bare back, that laid open a red gash at least a foot long and elicited a roar of pain and fury from the giant, who tried to bring round his horse again.

But Parson Jim knew too well the advantage he had gained to relinquish it. He was on Bill's rear, and kept his whip plowing on the horse's haunches to prevent it turning back.

In vain did Bill try to cut at the nose of the bay, reversing the trick that had cost him so dearly. Shepherd's long quirt was forever in front of his own horse's head, and every now and then Bill had to turn his back an instant.

The instant was always fatal, for in every case he received a fresh lash, till, his back streaming with blood, he roared:

"Enough a-bossback. I'll fight ye afoot till Old Scratch freezes to death."

And with that he leaped off.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIGHT ENDED.

BILL TRAVERS, covered with blood from the numerous lashes of the terrible quirt, foaming with fury at the easy way in which he had been handled by one he deemed a weakling, rushed to meet his foe, who, on his part, leaped to the earth and sent his long lash whistling to the front to meet a down blow from Bill, delivered with all his force.

The fight on foot was a much more dangerous proceeding than the one on horseback, for skill in horsemanship was no longer available to take either party out of danger.

Bill Travers, with his vast superiority in strength, rushed to close in, hoping to end the battle at once.

The little parson ran back and got in several

light slashes, on account of the giant's careless eagerness.

But still Bill would not be warned. He threw the long quirt behind him for a full-armed stroke, when, quick as a flash, Parson Jim put in one of his own, full on the cowboy's face, and leaped back with a grim smile as he saw that he had blinded his foe, as Bill's vengeful stroke missed him.

Then before Bill Travers could clear the blood from his eyes Parson Jim sent a full-armed blow, delivered with both hands, at the exact distance for an effective cut, and doubled up the giant, who fell on the grass with a yell of pain that no man had ever heard forced from Travers before.

Then, before he could rise, came a second blow, as scientific in its cruelty as the first, and Bill roared:

"Enough, enough! Gawl darn ye, I'm blind, or I'd wring yer neck."

"Clear the blood away then, and fight it out," cried Parson Jim sternly. "I only took a piece out of your forehead to teach you prudence. Wipe it off, and fight it out."

The blood was trickling into Bill's eyes, and his face, with its bushy beard, all matted with gore, presented a horrible appearance, as he growled out:

"Gawl darn yer skin, I b'lieve your Old Scratch hisself. You've got the luck of it this time. Dar' ye drop yer whip?"

Parson Jim replied by throwing down the quirt, and Bill Travers rushed at him to grapple in a rough-and-tumble. The little man ran back two or three steps and suddenly leaped in the air, sending both heels dashing into Bill's face with a droll "thud! thud!"

The gigantic cowboy met the blow in his blind fury, doubling its force, and the effect was instantaneous.

Down went Bill Travers in a heap and lay still, knocked senseless, when the little man turned to the other cowboys and said:

"Gentlemen, you'll bear witness, that I fought Mr. Travers fairly, will you not?"

As he spoke he walked over to where his pistols lay on the grass, picked up a pair and cocked them.

"Was it a fair fight?" he asked.

"Yes it were, stranger," replied Black Owen, heartily, "and you're the best little man I ever seen."

"Do you, any of you, wish to try a bout with me?" pursued Parson Jim in the same stern tone. "You're four, I'm one, but I'll take the four now, or else hold your peace forever."

Tim the Snipe was the only one who made answer, and he piped out:

"By gum, stranger, we don't want none of it. Bill Travers has been a-lookin' fur this ever so long, and he's got it. That's all. We'd 'a' stuck to him if you'd brought in the hull ranch, but we ain't the boys to bear malice arter a fair fight. Git yer duds on, stranger. We don't want to interfere with yer."

And so saying, he went over to the senseless form of Bill Travers, and the other three followed him, as Parson Jim slowly resumed his clothing, watching them keenly all the time, and ready to fire if he saw any signs of taking an unfair advantage of him.

But none of the four cowboys tried to take any such advantage, and they muttered to each other all sorts of pithy and admiring comments on the skill shown by the stranger, till he was fully dressed and walked over to look at Bill Travers, who was beginning to come to his senses. He looked like a man who had just passed through the middle of a tornado; for he was covered with blood and dirt. His forest of hair and beard was all matted with gore, his nose smashed flat, both eyes closed with a big blue swelling, and the mark of a beel plainly printed in blood on the middle of his face.

He tried to look up, but could only catch a glimpse through the swellings round his eyes, and grunted, "Gawl darn it, what's the matter?"

"The matter is that I've whipped you fairly," replied Parson Jim, distinctly. "Do you own up, Bill Travers?"

The giant heard him, and scowled in the midst of his bruises.

"Whipped me! No, by gum! Ef I could see ye, I'd lay ye out yet. I'll try it over again some day. Darn the luck."

"You won't do any such thing," said the parson, sternly. "You'll own up that you're whipped, or we'll try it over again now, with the quirts. I settle my business on the spot, or not at all. Will you pay for that steer?"

"Yes," grunted Bill, sulkily. "I've got ter do it, seein's how the boys is gone back on me."

"That's settled then. Now do you own up you're whipped, or do you want any more from the same place?"

As he spoke, Parson Jim drew the long lash of his quirt through his left hand, and made it snap like a pistol shot close to Bill's ears. The blinded giant scrambled to his feet, and stood grasping at the air wildly.

"Gawl darn ye, cut me to pieces. I ain't whipped yet!" he cried. "Oh, if I could get my claws on ye, I'd soon make ye squeal, I would."

"Very well," cried back Parson Jim, "if you

want to be cut to pieces, I'll not gratify you. Take your life from me, and remember that the Gentle Shepherd knocked you stiff and blind, and never got a mark for himself. When you get well again, if you want another whipping, I'll come round and give it to you. Good-day."

With the last words he walked away to his horse, mounted it and took his departure, Bill Travers grumbling:

"Gawl darn the luck. Ef I c'u'd only see him I'd foller."

Parson Jim heard him and came back, saying, as he sat on his horse:

"Bill Travers, thank your stars to day your name's not Tom Johnson. You don't know who I am yet, but I'm going to tell you. Do you remember a little, inoffensive tenderfoot that Tom Johnson and your gang tried to whip at Muleville, two years ago? I was that little tenderfoot. You stood between Tom and me when he was going to kill me. For that reason I spared you to-day. Tell Tom Johnson his turn is coming yet, and that he'll have to big before I let up on him."

Bill Travers listened, and his face took on a different look as he asked:

"Be you the little parson?"

"I am."

"Then I own up whipped," said Bill, holding out his hand. "Ef you're that parson, you've more grit than any man in Colorado fur yer size. Parson, you kin whip me. Air that 'nuff?"

The other men stared, but Parson Jim reached out his hand and took that of Bill Travers, saying:

"You're a good man, Travers, and we shall be friends in future. Good-by."

Then he rode quietly away, and Bill, with the assistance of his friends, got into his clothes—a rueful spectacle—and went home to wash himself and bind up his hurts. The giant had got all he wanted for one while, and felt sore all over, on account of the large surface of skin covered by the lashes of the terrible stockwhip. He had gone into the contest full of confidence, and had come out thoroughly cowed, with the same superstitious reverence for the Gentle Shepherd that seemed to be felt by every one who had ever encountered him.

Meantime Shepherd himself rode back to the Queen's Ranch, and passed the word to the stockmen to say nothing to Miss Wallace of what had occurred, for he seemed to have a singular pride in maintaining his reputation for peace in the eyes of his imperious little mistress. In the evening he went up to report what had happened, in his own manner.

He found Macdonald of Bushwhacker's taking his leave of Miss Wallace in the office, and received the curt command:

"Sit down there, Jim, till I'm ready to attend to you."

Then she went on to Macdonald:

"Now you've found your way here, we hope to see you often; and as for your overseer, Joel Brunton, we'll talk about him when you come again. I'm not quite disgusted with Jim Shepherd yet."

CHAPTER XII.

KATE'S CANDIDATE.

MACDONALD bowed and took his leave, saying to Shepherd:

"Whenever you're tired of your place here, remember that my ranch is always open to you."

Parson Jim bowed and replied:

"I shall always remember your kind offer, but I shall not leave the service of Miss Wallace till she's tired of me."

Kate tossed her head, but said nothing, as Macdonald rode off, till he was out of sight from the office, when she asked Shepherd in her usual way:

"Well, why don't you report? Has anything happened to-day?"

"Travers, the overseer of Fork Ford shot one of our strays to day," replied Parson Jim, in a matter-of-fact tone.

Her face instantly flushed angrily.

"Shot one of our strays! How dared he offer such an insult to me?"

"He did it out of wantonness, to provoke a fight, madam, but—"

"Well, sir, well?"

"You know you have instructed us all to keep the peace, whatever circumstances arise, so I concluded it would be best to make a written complaint to Mr. Carroll, Principal to Travers."

"You did right, sir," she answered, with a slight sneer. "Being a lady, I cannot carry things with a high hand, and it seems as if you aim to reflect my quiet endurance of what cannot be avoided."

Shepherd passed his hand over his lips to hide a smile and went on:

"Before writing, however, I judged it best to ride over and see Travers, to offer a reasonable remonstrance on the subject of an unreasonable assault."

"Indeed? And how was your reasonable remonstrance received, sir? Did you find the man as open to reason as are my men, thanks to my keeping them in proper order?"

She was evidently angry, slapping the table

with her whip, and ill concealing her scornful glances at him.

He shook his head.

"I must confess I found him disposed to be insulting and unreasonable, so I came away, after I had notified him of my intention to appeal to his employer."

"And what said he to that, sir?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, he became still more insulting, and it required not a little argument to convince him that my request was only just. Finally, I gained my point, and he has agreed to pay for the steer. I assure you, madam, that I have yet to find the cowboy who absolutely refused to listen to reason."

"And you mean to say that you actually persuaded him to pay for the steer?"

"He actually promised, before four of his own men, and I feel sure that the money will be paid by to-morrow night. If it be not, I must argue the matter again, but I have no fears that Travers will break his word."

Kate stared at her little overseer, and observed, slowly:

"You are a very strange person. How do you manage to make these men listen to you? In my own case it is different. They respect my sex. But you, a man without a man's strength—I don't understand it."

Shepherd allowed his smile to become visible as he answered, dryly:

"You know the proverb, '*Ingenuas didicisse artes fid liter emollit mores*'—"

Sue started up, scarlet with anger, and stamped her foot, crying:

"How dare you quote Latin to me, sir, after what I've told you? Are you trying to make fun at my expense, insinuating that I am an ignorant Colorado girl? Talk English to me."

His face was grave as an owl's, as he answered, with a bow:

"I crave pardon. I thought every one of ordinary education had heard so trite and well-worn a quotation. In plain English, it means that 'teaching the liberal arts softens the manners.' I am, it is true, but a little fellow, with nothing but my brains to back me, but even these uneducated cowboys recognize my advantages over them in point of education, and I find it easy to teach *them politeness*."

He laid such an emphasis on the word "politeness" that she sat down and said:

"I understand your innuendo, sir. I am not a Latin scholar, and if you aspire to teach politeness, remember to begin at home. No gentleman ever quotes Latin before a lady."

"I stand corrected, madam, and ask pardon for my rudeness," he replied, with the same mocking smile he wore so frequently before her, and which irritated her so greatly that she retorted hotly:

"I understand you there too, sir, just because we are alone; but if you wait till I apologize to you for what you call my rudeness, you will wait a long time."

"I intend to, madam," he replied as coolly as before. "I am one of those men who are content to wait."

"For what?" she asked.

As she spoke he saw her color deeply and raise her eyes defiantly, then turn them away. His own had never left her face during the interview, and he answered distinctly:

"Till you treat me like a gentleman entitled to courtesy. Have you any orders this evening, madam?"

"Yes. I want you to go to Muleville tonight."

"I am ready, madam."

"Of course you're ready. I order you to go," she replied as perversely as ever. "Do you know Judge Brown, a lawyer who lives there?"

"Yes, madam."

"Tell him I want to see him at once."

"Very good, madam."

He was retiring, when she said:

"Stop. I've a few words to say."

"I await them, madam."

She seemed to be a little embarrassed about saying them, and kept him for nearly a minute before she said abruptly:

"Do you know—Pacheco?"

She snapped out the last word as if she grudged to say it.

"I do, madam. Pray spare yourself the pain of saying the name. I know the man. Your errand relates to him, I presume."

For the first time she looked at him not unkindly.

"Thank you—yes; he is going to run for Assembly."

"I have heard it, madam. I think it is in bad taste, and I think he can be beaten by a good man."

"That's why I want Brown. They tell me he is a good speaker, but has no money. I want him to run. I will supply the means. I want to show this man I have not forgotten the past. Tell this Brown to come at once. I never saw him before, have you?"

"Yes, madam."

"Can he beat Pacheco?"

Shepherd hesitated a moment.

"Do you wish for a candid opinion on facts, or one to suit yourself?"

She frowned angrily.

"I want to know if he can beat that man."

"No, madam."

"Why not?" she asked, slapping the table nervously with her whip.

"Because he is a blatant, impecunious coward, with no recommendation but a certain kind of fluent eloquence."

"But he can make a speech?"

"Certainly; anywhere from one to two hours. But in all that time he will say nothing but platitudes."

"No matter; I will elect him, if money can do it. Will you help me?"

Her tone was as cold and hard as ever, and he replied with equal coldness:

"No, madam. I entered your service as an overseer, not a politician."

"Then you wish to stand by and see me—humiliated—by this—this man who—murdered my father?" she said in a husky whisper, broken by short dry sobs, her eyes burning like live coals as she looked at him.

He closed his lips firmly.

"Why won't you help me, Jim?" she asked him presently, in the same low tone. "You know I don't mean what I say when I scold. It's only my way. Every other man on the ranch would help me. Why won't you?"

For the first time since they had met, her tone was actually pleading; but his face was like a stone as he said:

"Because I am your overseer, madam, engaged to manage your cattle, to wait your convenience, to be treated as your servant, the slave of your whims. I earn my wages in that capacity, I believe. Now you wish me to undertake duties for which I was not engaged. I must decline, *at my present wages*."

She had been watching him eagerly as he spoke, and started up at his last words with a sigh of relief, crying:

"Is that all? I'll double them. I'll give you ten thousand dollars the day you beat Pacheco. I don't care how you do it, or whom you select, so long as you beat him. The day he is defeated, I'll put the cheque in your hands."

Shepherd shook his head and folded his arms as he replied:

"I understand you; but you do not understand me yet, Miss Wallace. I do not propose to electioneer for any one for money. I vote and work only from my convictions of right, and Mr. Pacheco, with all his faults, belongs to my party. If he receives the nomination, I am bound in honor not to work against him, unless I think him a bad man."

Kate Wallace stamped her foot.

"He is a bad man—a wretch—a murderer. I'll spend my whole fortune to beat him. You are afraid to meet him, that is what ails you. You fear his pistol, perhaps. Very well, I can do without you. Go and obey my orders. Bring Brown here. He will know enough for my purpose. Do you hear me? Go."

She pointed imperiously to the door, but he remained standing to reply:

"I have not yet said that I refuse, but neither have I named the conditions on which I consent, Miss Wallace."

Her lip curled.

"Oh, is that it? Standing out for terms? Well, sir, name them. I know you are a man of education. You try to make me feel that dayly. I am willing to pay you well. What do you ask?"

"An apology for the past and better treatment for the future," he said, quietly. "I told you I could wait for it, and it will come to me, or Pacheco will get the nomination and be our next member."

She stood with her head slightly turned away from him, patting her foot on the floor, and at last said:

"You ask what you will never get, sir; but I tell you what you will get if you persist in your request."

"And what is that, madam?"

"My bitter hatred and contempt, as one who takes advantage of my distress to—"

"To do what, madam?"

"To claim a respect I shall never accord till I see he deserves it. Ah, what might not that man deserve who should come to me and say, 'I have beaten Pacheco and disgraced him publicly.' I swear I believe I could marry such an one. But go, go. You are a student, a parson, a recluse. You know nothing of women. If you did—"

"If I did, I might act differently," he responded calmly. "Good-evening, madam. I will bring Judge Brown here to-morrow before sunset."

So saying he walked quietly out, and Kate Wallace, left to herself sat down and began to cry softly.

She looked up at the sound of his horse's feet and saw him riding away past the window in all his bravery of velvet and gold lace, his delicate Greek face and bright curls looking more effeminate than ever in the sunset glow, and she gave a slight shudder as she muttered:

"Oh, how I hate you, with your pretty face and your impudence! If you were only a man able to take your own part, it might be different. But as it is—I'll not give in—I'll not—not if I die for it."

She saw him dash off at a rapid canter on the road to Muleville, which lay some thirty miles off, and began to calculate on his return, when she heard the dinner bell, and soon after Nelly Craig came into the office, crying out:

"Why, Kate, where have you been? We are waiting dinner for you; and that dear little duck of a Parson Jim has just ridden off so you must be through business. Did you hear of a trouble on the ranch to-day?"

"Yes," said Kate wearily. "I suppose so. They know I'm a woman and think it safe to insult me. If Shepherd had been half a man he would have shot that impudent Travers."

Nelly opened her blue eyes.

"Shot him? Why, haven't you heard?"

"I heard what?"

"That the poor fellow got punished for his impudence worse than he deserved. His horse fell down a barranca—if you know what that is, I don't—and he was all smashed up, as the men call it."

"Who was all smashed up?"

"Why, Travers, the overseer at Fork Ford, to be sure. I saw Charley Brown, and he told me of it. Said that Travers's mother could not have known him."

"How often am I to tell you, Nelly, not to go talking to the cowboys! You don't know the day when one of them may take it into his head to insult you."

"Not a bit of it. Why, they're the best friends I have on the ranch, Kitty. They are all ready to swear by you and me, and by Parson Jim, as they call him."

"Yes, and for the same reason, I suppose. We're women, and he's an effeminate creature they look on as a prodigy of learning. Bah, Nelly, I've no patience with them. If I were them, I'd just pitch the little overseer off his horse, if he dared to order me round."

Nelly stared at her and stifled a laugh, which Kate observed and said sharply:

"I don't see what you're laughing at."

"Oh Kate, can't you see?"

"Is it at me?"

"Why certainly. How can you be so blind, so dreadfully blind?"

"To what? What do you mean?"

"To Parson Jim! Can't you see all the men on the ranch are afraid of him—afraid to death?"

Kate stared in her turn.

"Nonsense. Afraid of that whipper-snapper? Impossible!"

"There's Bill Marks out yonder. Ask him and see what he says," said Nelly, who was bursting to tell her secret.

"I will," said Kate, resolutely, and she called Marks over as he rode toward the shed.

The cowboy came awkwardly into the office, expecting a scolding, and stood turning his hat in his hands.

Kate beckoned him up in her imperious way, and began:

"See here, Marks. I want you to tell me the truth now, or I'll discharge you at once. Are you or are you not afraid of Mr. Shepherd, the overseer?"

Bill Marks started and looked round him apprehensively, saying:

"Marm?"

"Are you afraid of Jim Shepherd, I ask?"

"Well, marm, you see, marm, he's our overseer, marm, and he stands in your place, marm," said Marks, awkwardly, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. "We ain't, that is to say, jest afeared on him, marm, but he's a mighty good man, if he be small."

"Then it's for his goodness you obey him?" she said, interrogatively.

"Yes, marm," said Bill, with an air of great relief, "that's jest it, marm. He's a good man, marm, a right good man, and knows how to handle himself, that is; yes, he's a mighty good little man, marm. I don't want no muss with the Gentle Shepherd, marm. He knows more'n any two men I ever seen, and I've seen heaps."

Kate was still more puzzled.

"Then you mean that you respect his knowledge—is that it?" she asked.

"You bet, marm. What the Shepherd don't know ain't wuth knowin'. Why, he's got eyes in the back of his head, he has, and as fur—"

"That'll do," interrupted Kate, sharply. "I don't want a catalogue of his sciences. Tell me, suppose you were to get on a tear after selling day, and he were to come into a saloon and tell you to get out, what would you do?"

"Do, marm? We'd git, and durned lively, too, them as hed see the Gentle Shepherd to work afore."

"And the new hands who don't know him? How about them?"

Marks hesitated.

"Well, marm, I think he mout hav to argy the question with them, if so be they was drunk enough to be sassy, and didn't know the Shepherd; but you kin jist bet your boots, marm, and every durned rag on your back, that they'd come arter he got through with what argyments he thought necessary. He's a reg'lar tearer to argy a question, that 'ere Gentle Shepherd, marm."

"Well, you can go," said Kate, hastily, and as Marks shuffled out she said:

"It's positively amazing what a control he has over these men, when I haven't; and yet I'll swear he's not a head taller than I am, and I'm as strong as he is."

CHAPTER XIII. COLORADO POLITICS.

MR. JOAB APPLEYB was tilted back in a big wooden rocker, his feet on the sill of the bar-room window, talking politics to a group of his cronies, when Judge Boanerges Brown rolled in, serene and smiling, dressed in a new suit of black cloth that positively shone in its glossy richness, and ejaculated with a chuckle:

"How's this, boys? 'Leven o'clock, and not a man drunk yet? Applejack, my worthy friend, suppose you remove your athletic proportions to their native heath—that is get behind the bar. I treat the crowd to-day."

Joab turned round, and so did his cronies, to stare at the judge.

Only the day before, a red-nosed, ragged bummer, he had been refused trust at that very bar, and now he looked the very picture of unctuous, smiling respectability. He wore a chimney-pot hat that shone in the light and a huge chain with a bundle of seals, hung from his vest pocket, while his ruffied shirt was fresh from the laundry.

Even his boots were now and made of patent leather.

"Great Scott!" muttered Joab. "Who's b'en a-fixin' him up?"

But Mr. Appleby was too old at his trade to hesitate obeying the judge's order for his keen eye noted the fact that Brown's chain was real gold, and good for fifty dollars worth of drinks, so he stalked behind his bar, set up a number of glasses and pronounced the regulation question:

"What is it, gents?"

The judge leaned against the bar in a lordly manner and waved a five dollar bill, saying:

"Name yer p'isen, gents, name it. Primaries meets this arternoon, and I'm a candidate, I am."

"Is that it?" roared a voice. "Great Scott, boys! Wade in! The judge is a-gwine to run ag'in' Pacheco, and Muleville's alive ag'in' Hooror for Judge Brown! Wade in! Gimme rye straight, Applejack!"

And without more ado the whole party rushed up to the bar, and began to clamor for their favorite drinks while a small boy outside the door darted away to spread the news that "the judge had slathers of boodle and war gwine to run fur the legislator."

And it needs not to be told to any citizen of Muleville that the news circulated like an electric current.

If Muleville believed in any thing, she believed in the invincibility of "the judge" as an orator so long as he had "plenty of boodle."

Several cowboys from the ranches that lay round Muleville being in town purchasing supplies, heard the news and rushed for Joab's bar-room to make hay while the sun shone, and enjoy a regular old-fashioned drunk at a time when ordinarily temperance and hard work were the order of the day.

Money was scarce in Muleville, for the annual cattle drive was over and the cowboys had spent their wages. Rumors of a contested election had been dismissed as myths, for matters in Sangre Cristo county, had been so one-sided and monotonous for years that excitement had been absent from elections.

The great cattle lords had every thing their own way, sent up their men to vote like regiments of soldiers, and settled their "slates" at Denver in a manner that showed they understood the necessity of working for each other's interests and avoiding a quarrel.

And now here was a contest, a real activa canvass, openly announced by "the judge," whose flourishing and plethoric appearance showed that he was being "backed" by some one able to support the expense.

For Muleville was well aware that Brown had no money of his own and was being put forth by some one as a candidate from probable spite against Mr. Pacheco, who had been talked of on "Change" at Stocktown as the regular candidate, and under ordinary circumstances would have had a walk over.

Muleville was curious to know who was running "the judge," but perfectly content to take him on trust so long as the "boodle" lasted.

They found him in the bar-room of the Metropolitan Hotel, spending five-dollar bills as if they had been quarter-dollars, and holding forth in his best style to a delighted audience.

"Feller citizens," said the judge, "we've been trod under foot too long by these here grindin' monopolies, and we ain't gwine to stand it no longer. Here's these Carrolls and Pachecos and all kinder fellers like them, as gets land by the league at a time from Uncle Sam fur nothin', and gits cattle given to 'em, so they grow rich without knowing it."

This was the homely style in which he always began, but he felt it was necessary here to introduce a little rhetoric to impress his audience with an idea of his learning, so he went on:

"And who is it, fellow-citizens, who is it, I ask, that makes the wealth of these despots of

the cattle range? Who is it that bears the vertical rays of the summer's torrid sun, searching him to the very marrowbones, and with such fortitude braves the icy blast of the terrible norther in the desolate winter, to keep in the horned monarchs of the waste, coinin' money fur the bloated millionaire that purtends to own him, soul and body? Who is it, I ask, makes these men rich? Who is it that keers fur the cattle?"

"We-'uns, to be sure," yelled Conky Joe in the crowd, and the answered evoked a roar of applause, as "the judge" shook his forefinger, and cried out:

"The honorable gentleman speaks the truth, and I thank him for the answer. Gentlemen, the true proddocer of all the wealth of Colorado is the cowboy, the gallant, the devoted, the oppressed, the downtrodden cowboy, the prince of the range, the peerless flower of our country's manhood, the Colorado cowboy who kin whip his weight of Kansas suckers every time and don't you forget it."

The sentiment evoked a yell of applause and the judge continued, roaring out to make himself heard:

"How long shall this last? Air we men, or air we slaves, we cowboys of the great State of Colorado? Air we to liev our rights? Air we ready to fight fur 'em like men?"

"You bet we air," came an answering yell, and the excited men began to fire off pistols through the ceiling in their pot-valiancy at which the judge turned pale and stooped down, roaring:

"Don't, gentlemen, don't. Let me git through afore you shoot."

"Order, gents, order!" yelled Conky Joe; "this ain't 'laction day yit. Judge Brown has the floor."

And the tumult calmed down as the judge continued:

"That air the question, gentlemen? If you're game to stand up fur yer rights, I'm the man as will vote for 'em in Legislator and Congress every time. I'm the cowboy candidate, I am, and I've got one to back as is willin' to spend a bar'l of money to 'lect me as your representative. Hyar's my tickets, gentlemen. All I ax ye to do is to go to the primaries like men and send up delegates as you kin trust to vote for Old Bo Brown, the Cowboy Candidate."

As he spoke, he threw bundles of white tickets into the crowd, and a scramble commenced, in the midst of which the judge retired through a side door, after depositing a bank note in the hands of Joah Appleby, with instructions to let every man have "all be wanted."

Then the fun began, fast and furious, and quickly spread all over Muleville. Even the landlord of the "Rancher's Home," who had been a strong Pacheco man to that morning, changed his principles in the most unblushing manner, after having received a note from the judge, brought in by Conky Joe, who seemed to have constituted himself a sort of volunteer deputy to the candidate.

Muleville had never known a "livelier" day since the last cattle drive had passed by, and the whole male population was "on a tear."

And in the midst of it all, the candidate was sitting in an upper room of the Metropolitan Hotel, talking to a small pale gentleman, likewise dressed in a black with a white necktie, to whom he was saying:

"Well, Mr. Shepherd, and how did I do the trick?"

"Pretty fairly," returned Shepherd, with a slightly contemptuous smile. "You are a good mouthpiece, judge, if you have the ideas put in your head."

"And you're just the boy to put them in," answered the judge confidentially. "Me and you, Mr. Shepherd, would make a team to sweep Colorado. You ain't a speaker to be sure. You ain't got no voice like me. It's not every man has, but—"

"Oh hush!" interrupted Shepherd, in a quiet way. "Enough said, judge. I brought you your orders. All you have to do is to obey them. Do you think you're competent to run this town, now you've got it started?"

"With boodle, sir, with boodle," returned the judge, emphatically. "I kin handle any county in Colorado with the necessary boodle, but I needn't tell a man of your experience, Mr. Shepherd, that nothing kin be done till the grave train comes in."

Shepherd smiled.

"Oh, that's what you're looking after, is it? Well, I suppose you understand that I'm not going to see my principal bled beyond a reasonable amount. I know what it costs to run primaries, and I'm going to keep our funds in safe hands till election day."

The judge rubbed his hands unctuously, and replied with an obsequious grin:

"Whatever you say, sir, must be right. I suppose you've run conventions before this."

He said this slyly, as if he did not care much, but, for all that, he watched the other keenly, for the judge was an old politician, and he had never seen Shepherd before, so far as he knew.

The little stranger smiled in the same lordly, contemptuous fashion, as he said:

"You'll find out before I've done whether I

understand my business. Have you heard anything from Pacheco?"

"Well, no. Tom Johnson was to come in this afternoon; but I fancy he'll find the men all pledged."

"Tom Johnson, eh? Do you mean that Pacheco trusts him in a case like this?"

"Why, of course. You know how sure the thing's always been, so far. The men get their orders from the Rancher's League, and the conventions were all cut and dried. This is the first fight I remember in ten years. We've stolen a march on them, and shall capture the convention beyond a doubt."

"Yes, the convention. But how about the election?"

The judge winked.

"That depends on the gravel train coming in, sir. You'll have to buck against the pool, and they'll put in a bar'l to beat any independent ticket. Your principal—By the by, who is he, Mr. Shepherd? You haven't told me."

"Nor do I intend telling you. As long as I supply the money and the orders, I am responsible to my principal. If Tom Johnson comes into Muleville, you've got to run him out."

The judge looked aghast.

"Run him out. Great Scott! you don't know the man, sir. He's a giant in size and strength and the bully of the whole cattle range."

"Nevertheless, you'll have to run him out of Muleville, if he comes in before the delegates are elected. You said you could run Muleville, and I've fitted you out and paid you a thousand dollars to do the business. If you can't run Tom Johnson out, with a whole town in your favor, you'll have to give place to a better man."

The judge sat perspiring and shaking at the idea of running Tom Johnson out of Muleville, if that desperado should happen to pay him a visit.

"But, my dear sir," he pleaded, "I can carry the primaries without trying any such thing as physical force."

"Don't you believe it," returned Shepherd. "I know the cowboys pretty well. They will take your money and shout for you, but if they see you show the white feather in the canvass, they will cut you dead on election day. If Tom Johnson comes—"

Here they were interrupted by a wild yell from the streets outside, and the judge trembled in his fat, ejaculating:

"Great Scott! There he is, himself!"

They went to the window and saw a number of cowboys, headed by Tom himself, riding up in front of the hotel, surrounded by a yelling crowd, the men on foot fraternizing with those on horseback.

"You see," observed Shepherd, calmly. "You are sold out already unless you fight."

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW TO CARRY A PRIMARY.

"MERCIFUL heavens," said the judge, in a husky tone, "it's not possible they'll go back on us after such a treat. It's only a friendly meeting."

Shepherd eyed him with a curling lip.

"See here," he said, "do you want me to go down and run him out?"

"I wish to the Lord you would," groaned the judge. "I can't—I can't—it's impossible for me. Don't you know I've no nerves? It's constitutional. I can't help it."

"Very well," said Shepherd, quietly: "then I'll tell you how you can get the best of Tom Johnson without any fight."

"Can you?" cried the judge, eagerly. "By heavens, sir, if you can only show me a way out of this trouble, I'll resign in your favor. I can see Tom Johnson has been sent here to cow us down, as the cheapest way of carrying the primaries. He knows me well enough. I can talk all round him on a platform, but what am I to do if he challenges me to shoot?"

Shepherd nodded not unkindly.

"I see. I honor you for your frankness. I hate a braggart, but when a man comes out and owns he's a coward, I feel sorry for him. See here. Would a few drinks put courage into you?"

"It might, until shooting begins, but I know I should drop then. I'm so big and fat, it seems to me as if I was a regular target. It's not like a little fellow of your size. Seems to me I shouldn't care then."

Shepherd laughed.

"Well, I'll tell you what to do. You go down to the street and make them a speech. If Tom Johnson interrupts you, just ask him if he knows who is backing you. Of course he'll be eager to know. You tell him my name. That will be all that is necessary. Tell him that I have come here to see fair play at these primaries, and I'm going to have it."

The judge stared incredulously.

"But suppose he laughs at me?"

"Then just you call out to me by name, and I'll come down and clap a stopper on Mr. Johnson. Now go, or you'll be too late. I see he's trying to get them over to the Rancher's Home and make them hold a primary there. Go down

at once and do as I tell you. Here. Take a good horn and tone up."

The judge eagerly swallowed a glass of rare whisky at a gulp, and took his way down to the bar-room, to find it empty, the crowd outside yelling for Johnson and Pacheco.

"Gimme a big horn, Joe—a big one," he said, huskily, and the second dose put enough courage into him to take him out into the street, where the crowd began to cheer him, and Tom Johnson turned round on his broncho and stared at him as if he could not believe his eyes at the spectacle.

Then the judge lifted up his voice, and the shouting ceased as he roared:

"Feller-citizens, I move we holds the primaries right here, in Applejack Joe's bar-room, and app'nt Joe the 'spector of 'lection. All who are of that opinion will say ay."

A roar of ayes went up, and then Tom Johnson rode through the crowd to the judge, drawing up his quirt in his hand and demanding savagely:

"What in blazes is the matter with ye, you old bloat? What's yer racket—say?"

"My racket, sir, as you are pleased to call it," answered the judge, with a faltering voice, "is to claim justice for the lowly and persecuted cowboy. You're one yourself, Mr. Johnson; you know you are. I'm fighting your battle as well as my own. I am fighting for—"

"Oh, shucks!" shouted Tom, rudely. "You! Gawl darn your fat karkidge, be you talkin' fight? I'll take all the fight out of you in jest one lick, you pudden-headed gopher. You! Fight?"

His accent was that of the most ineffable contempt, and the judge interrupted:

"My dear sir, my dear Mr. Johnson, you misunderstand me. I mean only a metaphorical, a moral battle, sir, with brains for weapons."

"Weepins!" yelled Tom, louder than ever. "Jest bear the fat galoot talk of weepins, boys. Say, what'n thunder did you come her for, anyway?"

"I came here," said the judge, more firmly, as he noted that Tom did not seem to be in real earnest, "to run for Legislator for Sangre Cristo county. I camo here to appeal to the suffrages of my feller-citizens, and I'm a-goin to stay, I am, and to run as the cowboys' candidate, I am, with your leave, Mr. Johnson."

Johnson stared at him.

"You be a-goin' to run fur Legislator? You? Why, gawl darn yer fat karkidge, ye hain't got a cent to your name. Who's backin' yer?"

"Who is backing me?" asked the judge, gaining more confidence. "I'll tell you. It is a gentleman by the name of Shepherd is doing it, and he told me to tell you that he had come down here to see fair play at these primaries, and intends to do it."

"A gentleman by the name of Shepherd, is it?" echoed Tom. "And who'n thunder is he and whar does he live?"

There was a dead silence in the crowd, and then a voice in the rear piped out:

"It's the Gentle Shepherd, Tom, that's who it is."

Tom Johnson started violently in his saddle, and his hand went to his hip after a pistol, when a voice from the window above them startled all the crowd.

A gentle voice, a clear one, but heard distinctly everywhere.

"Tom Johnson, get out of Muleville. I've got you covered. Get."

Tom gave one glance round, saw no one at the window, and then wheeled his broncho and started off down the street, calling out:

"Git, boys. We ain't no show hyar."

In three minutes Muleville was clear of his presence, and the ready-witted judge, as soon as the peril had passed, roared:

"We have met the enemy and they are ours. Three cheers for the cowboy candidate. Let's hold the primaries now, and have no more trouble. The bar's open free, gents, and we pay for the day's drinks."

The thirsty crowd, elated with the victory over Tom Johnson, rushed pell-mell into the bar-room, and held a primary, cowboy fashion, every one speaking at the same time, all wanting to go as delegates, no one wanting his neighbor to go, but finally settling on a representative body consisting of Conky Joe, Scarfaced Jake and Tim the Snipe, all of whom were pledged to vote for Judge Brown, and stick to him through thick and thin, at the assembly convention, to be held at Muleville next day.

That settled, the judge went up-stairs, and found the little gentleman he had left there, quietly smoking a cigar.

"Well?" demanded Shepherd.

"Well, sir," responded the judge in a grandiloquent manner, "I cowed him down. I drove the ruslin howling from Muleville, under the lightning of my glance, and this town is solid for the cowboy candidate. He quailed and fled, sir, quailed and fled!"

"How many drinks did you take?" asked Shepherd, with a drawl.

"Drinks, sir? Drinks?"

"Yes, drinks. You're getting courageous now he's gone. Did you do as I told you?"

"I did, sir, and I'll tell you what he is—"

"Hold on. That'll do. Sit down there. I want to know how many delegates there are in the convention?"

"Sixteen," said the judge, promptly.

"And you've only secured three. How do you manage things out here?"

The judge winked.

"Oho! I see you're not used to Colorado conventions, sir. It's only necessary to carry the town the convention is held in, to do all you want. You see, we hold the convention in public, and it's pretty hard to tell who's a delegate and who is not. The crowd shouts, and the whole thing's carried by shouting, if it doesn't end in a free fight. Now Tom Johnson has gone, we're all right. I can run the town till election day."

"But suppose he comes back?" asked Shepherd, quietly.

"He will never come back, sir, never. him out of Muleville, and if he ventures to return, the boys will open fire on him at once," said the judge, valorously.

Shepherd shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, if you say so. I shall report to my principal now. Keep things straight. I shall be back when the convention meets tomorrow. It is understood, is it, that you feel competent to run this town alone?"

"You can put your existence to the hazard of a wager on the fact, sir," returned the judge, loftily. "What old Bo Brown doesn't know of Colorado politics is not worth knowing."

"All right," said Shepherd, briskly. "Then you don't want me any more, so I'm off."

He rose up, and was going to the door, when the judge observed, slyly:

"I suppose it's no use asking the name of your principal?"

"None, sir. Good-day."

And the little man was gone.

The judge looked out of the back window of the Metropolitan Hotel, and saw him ride away on a bay horse, in his black, clerical suit, with a broad prairie hat on his light curls, unarmed to. ll appearance, and said to himself:

"Who is he, and where did he come from? seem to have seen him somewhere."

But as he could not settle the point to his own satisfaction, he went down to the bar-room to tell stories and lay out a plan of campaign for the convention, in which he felt assured of success, now that Tom Johnson had gone away from the town with his bullying methods.

Meantime Mr. Johnson himself had by no means gone out of Muleville for good, as the judge fondly imagined.

It was true that under the influence of surprise, with the idea that he was covered by the pistol of an unseen foe with no chance to shoot back, he had stampeded with all his followers, to the number of nearly twenty; but the cowboys, being natural cavalry, are prone to such rapid retreats and just as rapid returns to action.

Tom galloped out of Muleville at full speed, but as soon as he found himself on an open plain he halted and said to his men:

"See here, boys, this won't do. Tain't only the Ten Leaguers is into this little racket, but the pool's behind us too. Boss Pacheco'll never forgive us if we crawl like this. We've got to go back and clean out that crowd. I don't believe the Gentle Shepherd's thar at all. It's jest a skin. That's what it is. Besides, if the Gentle Shepherd be thar, he's only one man, and we kin clean him out, I reckin'."

The men assented to his idea, under the combined influence of shame and avarice. They knew that if they succeeded in taking possession of the primaries after what had already happened, they would earn credit to themselves and substantial rewards from the Rancher's Pool, which managed all elections in the county.

But they also knew that they had no chance to ride into the town with only twenty men and accomplish anything while the Mulevillians had fighting whisky on board, and stood on their own ground.

"We've got to raise a 'lection bee," was Tom Johnson's verdict. "Scatter and rake up every durned ranch in the league. We've got to go into that ere convention five hundred strong, and run things to suit ourselves. Old Bo Brown ain't nothin'. I want to find who's behind him. If it's a rancher, we'll see what the bosses say to one of themselves going back on 'em."

"Here's a feller comin' from the town now," remarked one of the cowboys, who rejoiced in the name of Kansas Kit. "By gum, boys, he looks like a lawyer or a parson, he do. Wonder who he is!"

"Reckon he's the cuss at the bottom of all this," remarked Tom Johnson grimly. "Let him have it, boys. By the jumpin' geeroosalem, we don't want no lawyers hyar."

They saw a man in a black coat riding toward them at an easy canter; on a slender bay horse, and it needed no further incitement for the cowboys to rush at him with hostile intent. The ranger was apparently unarmed,

which suited to their taste, for even a cowboy can't live with a gun.

"As he come out Tom yell'd, 'Stranger, I bar ye gun!'"

"Well, I'll plenty can't do, that's the way I'll run the convention. 'Gitter up, boy, and I'll give you some of you makin' in impudence."

"The hen and chickens you say," cried Tom Johnson, scornfully. "Why, I'm durned if it ain't!"

As he spoke he recognized in the slender figure, black coat, white tie and fair curls of the stranger the very man he had thrashed so brutally, two years before, looking just the same, except that he was on horseback, and equally unarmed, save for a long black quirt with a gold handle. The stranger was riding up to him, and Tom shouted to his men:

"It's the parson I whipped two year ago. The little cuss didn't die. By gum, I'll make him beg now, I will! Let me do it alone, boys."

sayin', he dashed his black horse at the parson.

To his amazement and mortification, the other turned his horse around as he came, put his hand behind the saddle, and the bay kicked out with such force that Tom uttered a roar of pain.

"My leg! He's broke my leg!!!"

He reached for his pistol to fire, and away dashed the bay horse, full speed, distancing the black in a dozen leaps, while Tom Johnson, from the intense pain in his leg, was actually unable to get out his pistol and point it correctly till the other was nearly fifty yards away. His leg was not actually broken, but it hurt fearfully, and when he at last fired he missed the little stranger, who threw back a defiant laugh, calling out in clear, bell-like tones:

"Put them up, Tom, put them up! I'll spoil your shooting for good, if you are not careful."

"Arter the little cuss! Shoot him down, boys," groaned Tom, grinning with rage and pain, and the cowboys needed no second invitation, as they whipped out their revolvers and opened fire.

But the stranger seemed to take no more heed to their bullets than if they were firing snipe-shot, as he galloped away, and his horse was so far fleeter than theirs that he was soon out of range, when they gave up the chase in disgust.

Tom Johnson swore a deep oath that he would be even with the little stranger, and dispatched his men in all directions as couriers to gather in recruits from the different ranches whose owners belonged to the "pool," to notify them that there was to be a contest at the county convention next day, and that if they wanted the Ranchers' ticket to win they must bring up their men in force enough to clean cut the lively town of Muleville.

CHAPTER XV.

DISCHARGED AT LAST.

MISS KATE WALLACE was out on horseback on her own lands that afternoon, and her face wore an anxious, worried look as she watched the road to Muleville.

She was expecting the return of Shepherd, who had already been a few missions to that lively township, reporting the progress of the negotiations with Tom.

At last, just as the sun was about to touch the west, she saw her overseer coming back, and noted that in his absence he had changed his dress. Instead of the brilliant theatrical figure he had formerly presented, bristling with weapons, he was now attired in the close fitting black of a professional man in the East, and to a I seeming, unarmed.

He rode up to her, and doffed his broad hat with his usual easy grace, as Kate said, with patronizing frankness:

"You look better that way, Mr. Shepherd, is a civilized gentleman. Believe me, you don't become the fancy cowboy style. It does not suit your personality."

"Thank you," he replied tranquilly. "As a man of peace I am glad you approve of the change. I am not, however, altogether unarmed, though I appear so. But that is not to the purpose to-day. Shall I report?"

"Certainly. What have you done to-day?"

"I've carried the primaries at Muleville for your nominee, and the convention meets there to-morrow. Pacheco has not come down, but I think he will come to-morrow, if Tom Johnson sends him word what was done to-day."

"And what was done?"

"Tom Johnson was run out of the town by a trick."

"What of that?"

"Well, not much, only this: that the whole Ranchers' Pool is behind Pacheco, and that they will strain every nerve to put him in, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless they know who is setting up the new member against him."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, I could explain, but I fear to hurt your feelings."

Her face paled a little; she bit her lip, and said in a low tone:

"Never mind them. Tell me why?"

"I mean that, if they knew it was you who is

trying to beat Pacheco, they would all retire and leave him to fight his own battle with you. They would recognize your right to be his enemy. So far, true to your orders, I have concealed your name; and one reason for changing my dress was to hide my own identity as your overseer. But I warn you it will be a tough fight to-morrow if the Ranchers' League takes up the contest."

"But we can beat, can we not?"

"To tell you the truth, I fear not, with Brown for a candidate. In another state of society it might be different; but he is such a blatant coward that he requires some one behind him all the time to bolster him up."

She turned her horse to ride home, with a face on which invincible obstinacy was imprinted, saying:

"Then he must be bolstered up. I am set on his election. He must be elected. You must assist me."

"I have already told you I decline."

"And you have already done just what I ordered you," she retorted, with a glance of triumph in her dark eyes. "I shall soon be ready to discharge you, Jim Shepherd. I told you I'd break your spirit."

Shepherd looked at her trim little figure as she rode beside him, and said dryly:

"It is a contest of wills, Kate, that's all."

She flashed a glance of scorn at him, and raised her riding whip, saying:

"You insolent fellow, if you dare to call me by my Christian name again, I believe I'll horsewhip you."

"Very well," he answered quietly, "I have told you I shall not leave your service till you discharge me, but a horsewhipping is equivalent to notice to quit. So I give you notice that if you strike me with that whip I shall leave you at once, and your candidate will be beaten. So what do you say to that, Miss Kate?"

"I say you're a mean, contemptible little man to take advantage of a lady in a difficulty," she retorted with a pout, but letting her whip fall. "Wait till this is over, Mr. Shepherd, and we'll settle our quarrel. In the meantime, if you've the spirit of a man you'll stand by a poor lonely girl who is trying to inflict some punishment on the murderer of her father. You might help me, Jim."

And she favored him with one of her soft pleading glances, to which he only replied:

"I've told you already on what conditions I would help you. When you come to them, I will insure you the defeat of Pacheco, not before."

"Very well, then, keep to yourself," she said spitefully. "I thought I had a friend in you, but I was deceived. I'll go to Muleville myself to-morrow, and we'll see what a woman can do. Good-evening, sir."

She whipped her horse, while he rode more slowly after her, arriving at the office in time to see her come out, deliver a note to Pedro the vaquero and send that worthy off full speed.

As Shepherd approached, she called out to him in her most imperious tone:

"I shall not want you on that business any more, sir. Return to your cattle; I am going to attend to it myself."

He bowed coldly, asking:

"Are there any orders, madam?"

"None, sir."

And with that she walked off to the house with her chin in the air, while Shepherd went to his quarters and resumed his rancher's dress, with his usual duties. As for Kate, she was unusually nervous and absent-minded at dinner that evening and seemed to be expecting some one; for she sat out on the piazza till late in the moonlight, and ordered Tonio to have a room ready for a guest. At half past ten o'clock the noise of the dogs on the ranch announced the arrival of a stranger, and Pedro the vaquero rode up with a gentleman, who revealed, as he came up the steps of the piazza, the face and form of Macdonald, of Bushwhacker's Creek.

Macdonald looked both surprised and flattered, as he said to his hostess:

"You did me the honor to send for me. I am here, much at your service."

"And I am very glad to see you," she replied cordially. "If you will follow me to the library, I have something to tell you, a favor to ask of you."

"If it lies in my power, be assured it shall be granted," he answered, and with that he followed her, much to the jealous annoyance of Mr. Howe and three other "tenderfoot" gentlemen, who had been devoting their energies to ingratiating themselves with the heiress for a week past, and who saw in big, stalwart Macdonald, with his bushy beard and handsome figure, a probable rival.

They went into the library, these two, and Kate threw herself into an easy-chair, pointing to another, saying:

"Please shut the door."

Macdonald obeyed, and then sat down to await the confidence of his hostess, who presently broke out, after thinking a little while:

"Do you know anything about politics?"

"Very little. I have been too busy trying to

make a fortune to have time to attend to politics as I ought."

"Do you belong to the Rancher's League?"

"No, madam?"

"I'm glad of that. Then you can help me to-morrow at Muleville?"

"At Muleville?"

"Yes, at that convention."

"I beg your pardon, I don't understand. If you would be good enough to explain, Miss Wallace, I should be glad to help you if I knew how to do it. But I fear I don't."

She seemed to be disappointed, for she said with an air of vexation:

"I thought you knew all about it. There is a convention there, to nominate a member of assembly, and Mr. Pacheco is going to run for it. I want to beat him. Will you help me?"

Macdonald stared.

"But why? I am not intimate with Mr. Pacheco, certainly, but—"

"But what, sir?"

"But I should hardly like to antagonize him unless I knew his opponent to be a better man in every respect."

"Pacheco is a bad man—a gambler, a murderer. I hate him. He murdered my father four years ago, and now he has the insolence to seek to represent me in the legislature."

She spoke in low, intense tones, her eyes flashing with anger.

Macdonald, on his part, asked coldly:

"And who is the other man, with whom you wish to defeat Pacheco?"

For the first time since Kate Wallace had entered the contest she felt embarrassed.

"It is Judge Brown of Muleville. I never saw him, but they say he is a good speaker. But that's not the point. I would take any one, no matter whom, to beat Pacheco. He must be beaten."

Macdonald shook his head.

"It won't do, Miss Wallace. I know the man you wish to put up. He is a lazy, drunken, worthless vagabond, who cannot poll ten votes on his merits as a man. I should like to oblige you very much, but you don't seem to understand that men do not vote for each other merely to spite some one else."

"Then you refuse to aid me?" she said, in a low, bitter tone. "You are a friend of my mortal foe."

"Far from it. I can see, from your point of view, that Mr. Pacheco's presence in the Legislature would be very galling—"

"Galling! My God, man, can't you see? He has triumphed over me for years, and now he flings this in my face as a last insult."

"I think you're wrong, but never mind that. Mr. Pacheco might be beaten, if you could put up a better man."

"Won't you run?" she asked, suddenly. "I must beat that man somehow. It shall not cost you a cent. I'll pay all the money I have in bank to beat him. Won't you run, as a favor to me, Macdonald?"

He shook his head.

"Impossible. You don't see the point. When I go into politics, I shall do it deliberately, on my own responsibility, with my own money. I cannot afford to be put up as any one's candidate, and especially to have it said of me that I am a mere stool-pigeon for a lady's revenge. I positively decline. If you wish to beat Pacheco, you must put up a good man, if you can find one, who wishes to run. If you want one of your own, why not put up Shepherd? He is in a different capacity from me. He is your paid employee, a gentleman by education, and capable of filling any position in the State. He would have no scruples at being elected by your money, I think, because he already takes it for his services in other directions."

Kate had been listening with a strange expression, and now she asked:

"Do you really mean to say that you recommend me to ask Shepherd to run against Pacheco, an overseer against a rancher?"

"I certainly do. He is a better man than Pacheco. What I can do to help him, I will."

"Very well, sir, I will take your advice; but remember, if it turns out ill, you are responsible for it."

She spoke with a tone full of hidden meaning, and added:

"Be kind enough to ring the bell."

He obeyed her wish, and when Tonio came to the door she said:

"Desire Mr. Shepherd to come here."

Macdonald rose to leave the room.

"Why are you going?" she asked.

"Because I supposed that you would wish no witnesses to your interview, Miss Wallace. I shall ride home to night, if you have determined to take my advice. You'll need all the votes and men you can get to-morrow. To tell you the truth, outriders are scouring the country for the Rancher's League, and you may have to face five hundred men at Muleville to-morrow. My own men are at your service."

"How may have you, sir?"

"Sixty-three."

"And I a hundred and seventy. We need more help, I fear."

"Leave Shepherd alone for that, Miss Wal-

lace. He'll bring you out safe, if it be in human nature to do it. Good-night."

Then he was gone, and she sat at the little library table, brooding over his words, till a tap came at the door, and Shepherd entered the room in his rancher suit.

She motioned him to a chair, and he sat down, while she remained brooding for more than a minute, the overseer watching her gravely, but not offering to speak, till she at last said:

"Mr. Shepherd."

"Madam."

"I sent for you to ask of you a favor."

"Indeed?"

The answer was peculiarly dry.

"Yes. To ask you a favor."

"I thought it was to receive orders."

"No, it was not."

"Then the sooner I retire the better, Miss Wallace."

"Why?"

She looked surprised.

"Because," he replied slowly, "you have chosen to place our relations on the footing of absolute despot and submissive slave, and a despot asks no favors of her subjects. I am ready to take orders, but not to grant favors, madam."

"I see," she said, bitterly, "you are like all little men, too mean to forgive a woman's petulance. Very well, sir, I have not been deceived in you. You can go. Your services are no longer required."

Shepherd started up.

"You discharge me, then? I am no longer in your service?"

She looked up at him in amazement. The man was transformed. His face, usually so quiet and grave, worked with joyful excitement, and the proud beauty was stung to the heart at the certainty which burst upon her that the overseer was eager to be turned out of her service.

"Yes," she said, bitterly. "I discharge you. You are no longer in my service. You can go. Do you hear me? I hate the very sight of you."

And then to her surprise, Shepherd burst into a laugh, and cried out:

"Thanks, thanks, a thousand thanks! You don't know what a relief it is, Miss Wallace, to be out of a woman's service. You're the first person ever caused me a moment's trouble, and I'll never enter a woman's service again. Now then, that favor you asked me a moment ago! I'll grant it with pleasure, if it lies in my power. What is it?"

Kate was amazed still more.

"What do you mean?" she began in her usual imperious tone, but he checked her instantly by saying:

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense. I'm not your overseer now. Don't be absurd. I'm your friend, if you'll allow me to be. I don't bear malice against you for your temper. You're only a spoiled child after all. Come. What's the favor you desire? I've told you I'll grant it."

Kate looked petrified at his freedom.

"Favor! I ask no favors of you now. I tell you I hate you."

CHAPTER XVI.

FRIEND OR FOE.

SHEPHERD smiled as serenely as ever.

"Well," he said quietly, "that's an advance from your former feeling. I'm content to wait for the rest. It will come. In the mean time, since you won't tell me what was the favor you desired, I will. Macdonald has been here. You asked him help you beat Pacheco. He refused, and you had to come back to me. I knew he would. Well, what did he say? He told you Brown was an unavailable man, and that if you wanted to fight, you must fight to win. If you want to beat Pacheco, you must hide your prides and vanities and petty spites, and sink every thing in the battle. Macdonald would make a good man himself."

"He refused to run," she replied, shortly. "I offered to pay the expenses, but he's like all the rest; he refuses to be thought a woman's candidate. Oh, if I were only a man! if I could only meet that oleum villain like a man, I would ask no help. But they all know my weakness, and they presume on it."

And passionate Kate shed a few bitter tears of disappointment and anger, as the young man opposite watched her with a glance of curiosity and sympathy mingled with some other feeling he was anxious to hide.

Presently he said softly:

"I don't think that I have ever presumed on your weakness, Miss Wallace. Had I done so, you might have respected me less than you do, in spite of the hatred which you avow."

"I don't know what you mean," she answered listlessly. "All I know is that every one seems against me in this, and that it will end in giving Pacheco another triumph over me."

"What did Macdonald advise?" he asked after a short pause, during which he watched her averted face.

"He told me to run you for a candidate."

"He did?"

"Yes. That was the favor I was going to ask you; but which I shall not now."

"You are quite right."

She started and looked at him.

"Quite right? Do you mean that—?"
"That I should refuse? Unquestionably, except on certain conditions. Good heavens, Miss Wallace, what do you suppose men are made of? You are the most innocent personage I ever met in the whole course of my life."

Kate looked astounded and began to color.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What have I said or done that is so dreadful? Macdonald seemed to be angry, and you, too; yet all I ask you to do—"

"Is to take a woman's bounty and buy my way into politics," he retorted scornfully. "To be pointed at all the rest of my life. No, no. You, in your innocence don't seem to reflect on the construction people would put on such an action. You are young and pretty, and you ask me to help you defeat your mortal enemy, paying my expenses. That is a matter in which only the members of your own family can interfere, and I have not the honor of belonging to it."

"But you named conditions just now," she answered, bewildered. "What are they?"

Shepherd caught up his hat and went to the door, from whence he looked back to say in a low voice:

"There is only one way in which I can ever help you to your revenge on this man, Pacheco. Give me the right, as your affianced husband, and I'll drive him from Singre Cristo county. That is my condition. Farewell. When you wish for me, send to Macdonald's Ranch."

Her head had sunk between her hands, but he could see that she was crimson over neck and ears.

He said nothing more, but passed out and went to his quarters, where he set to work packing up all his belongings in a pair of huge Mexican saddlebags. His possessions were few and soon packed away, but the task was not completed when a knock came at the door, and Tonio made his appearance, looking scared and grieved, holding out a note.

"You really going, señor?" he said, with a shaking voice. "La señorita say yes, and she cry, vat ve do, you no here, señor?"

The honest fellow was nearly blubbering as he held out the note, and Shepherd said:

"Never mind, Tonio. There are other men in Colorado as good as me. Who gave you this note?"

"The señorita. She say—don't go—I t'ink."

And Tonio really blubbered now.

Shepherd tore open the note, and read with a subtle smile of triumph:

"You are too ready to part for a hasty word. Come back into my service. I apologize for my rudeness, and offer you double your present salary, with ten per cent. of the increase of the stock."

"K. W."

He smiled to himself, muttering:

"Her pride dies hard, but it is dying."

He hastily scribbled his answer.

"If you were to offer half your estate I would not re-enter your service. You need a master, not a servant."

JAMES ARTHUR,
"The Gentle Shepherd."

He handed the note to Tonio, saying:

"Tell the señorita she knows my terms when she wishes to send for me."

Then he closed his packing, went out and saddled his horse, and an hour later had arrived at the door of Macdonald's Ranch, where he found the master still up, smoking the pipe of peace with his overseer, Joel Brunton, in the corner of the log chimney. Macdonald rose up amazed.

"Why, Shepherd, old fellow, I'm delighted to see you. What's brought you here at this hour of the night?"

"I've left Miss Wallace's service," said the other, briefly, "and I've come to ask you for a shake-down for to-night. That's all."

Macdonald's face expanded into a broad grin.

"What, has spitfire quarrled at last?"

"Yes. There's a chance for Joel now. She'll take him at his own terms."

Joel Brunton, a crabbed old man with a gray beard, shook his head.

"Thanky fur nothin'. I've heern tell of the Queen afore now. She's too high-strung fur me and her to git on, tho' she pays good wages. I stays where I'm treated like a gentleman, and I don't want no better boss nor Mr. Macdonald, so you needn't 'spect to boost me out, young feller, if you be the Gentle Shepherd."

Shepherd laughed.

"I don't want to. In fact I've about made up my mind to quit overseer's work and run for the Legislature."

Joel uttered an oath of surprise.

"Jumpin' Geehoshaphat, and cream-colored crickets! You'll just rake the pool, you will! Say, young feller, I'll vote fur ye myself, I will. Scissors! that's a go!"

Macdonald gave him a meaning look.

"And are the expenses arranged for?"

"Expenses? No. That's what I came to see you about, my dear fellow. I want you to lend me some money, I have a little of my own, but not enough."

"You shall have all you want," responded

Macdonald, heartily. "I've twenty thousand dollars in bank, and I'm ready to spend every cent to help elect you, because you'll be an honor to the district. But I couldn't turn in to help that old bloat Brown. Could I now, I put it to you?"

"No one asks you, now. But he will be useful in his way, if we can retain him for our side. See here, Macdonald, I have more at stake in this contest than you know. If I win, I'm a made man. If I lose, I shall leave Colorado and go back to the East. Thank God I've got back my health now and am able to work again."

Macdonald puffed out a cloud of smoke.

"Going into the church, eh?"

"No," returned the other, with a slight sigh, "there was a time when I had dreams in that direction, but they disappeared two years ago under the attack of a brute. I find that I cannot forgive. I don't know just what I shall do. But I'm not beaten yet. Are you ready to go to Muleville to-morrow?"

"Certainly. I'd arranged that already with somebody else. You'll have my sixty, the Queen's men, and who else?"

"I can get the Fork Ford men, I think. Bill Travers will fight for me now. I never knew the man that I couldn't argue into being a friend of mine."

Macdonald grinned.

"You mean thrashed into it. See here, Shepherd, what is the meaning of all this affectation by you of mildness and peace, when, from what Brunton tells me, you have killed more men than any other cowboy on my ranch?"

Shepherd smiled.

"A little plan of my own. I have my reasons, which I'll tell you some day. I believe in moral suasion, backed by a certain amount of material force. But it's the moral effect that is the most efficacious. See here. Did you ever teach school?"

Macdonald made a grimace.

"Once, for a week."

"Well?"

"Well, they run me out then. I wasn't allowed to whip the boys. It was in Boston. And they used to play all kinds of rackets on me. I concluded finally that I was not cut out for a school teacher."

Shepherd smiled.

"I taught school from sixteen to twenty-one, and always had order. It's a secret, a knack. I'm using it here. Well, are you sleepy? I am."

And within an hour after Macdonald's Ranch was wrapped in quiet, and Shepherd lay on a bull's hide fast asleep.

In the mean time, on that same night, Pedro the Vaquero was riding all alone to Muleville, where he roused up the landlord of the Metropolitan Hotel to ask for Judge Brown, who occupied a room there, in his new-fledged dignity of candidate.

He was admitted after a good deal of growling on the part of Joab, and the judge was roused from his slumbers to see Pedro the Vaquero standing by his bedside, holding a letter in one hand and a tallow candle in the other.

The stupefied judge required some hard shaking and a basin of cold water to regain his senses, but at last he managed to read the note, which ran as follows:

"JUDGE BROWN: You have received, so far, from your backer, a thousand dollars cash and a suit of clothes. If you obey the orders contained in this letter you will find ten thousand dollars placed to your credit in the Bank of Denver on the day that Pacheco is defeated."

"To-morrow, at the convention, you must instruct your delegates to vote for James Arthur Shepherd, and you must work faithfully for him till the day of election. It is essential that the name of your backer should be kept secret; but, to show that I am responsible, I sign my name. You must burn the letter at once, and keep my secret."

"KATE WALLACE."

The judge rubbed his eyes and looked at Pedro, stupidly, asking:

"Who gave you this?"

"The señorita," was the laconic answer. "I am to see it burned. Burn it."

The judge burned it in the candle, and Pedro gravely went to the door.

"Hold on!" cried Brown; "doesn't the lady want an answer?"

"No, señor. I give de letter; you see it. She say he obey. If he disobey, Pedro give him *cuchillo*. You know *cuchillo*, ha?"

The judge shuddered in bed.

"Heavens, yes! You mean a knife. I'll be as silent as the grave, on my honor, and do all the lady says. Good-night."

"Buenas noches," said Pedro, grimly, and then he stalked out, light and all, gave Joab a dollar for his trouble, remounted his horse and galloped away toward the Queen's Ranch, as patient and silent as if he had not already ridden sixty miles that night. When he reached his home he found the ranch all astir in early dawn, the cattle lowing as they went to water, the cowboys blowing their long horns, whips cracking, and every one getting ready for the work of the day.

Pedro noted all the usual signs of bustle and something extra, for the young mistress of the ranch herself was out on her bay horse, order-

ing and superintending, as if she were playing overseer.

And Pedro, in his dogged obedience, asking no questions of any one, did not know that Shepherd had left the place, for Tonio, the house-servant, was the only person yet let into the secret, till his mistress beckoned him up and said:

"Pedro, I want you to act as overseer for a few days. Mr. Shepherd has left us."

Pedro started.

"Don Diego!"

"Yes. He has left us, and is going to run for the Legislature from this district. Do you think we can help him, Pedro?"

Pedro grinned as he looked round.

"Not a vaquero but will vote for Don Diego, señorita. *Hombre de bien*—you say good man—*si—por dios*—Don Diego—he keel von—two—eleven men—be vip Beel Travero—ah *Sangre Santo*. Don Diego de besta man in Colorado. You say he gone? Ah, *madre de Dios!* den I spik outa. He say he keel us if ve tell you, vilo he vas *mayer domo*. Now iteez cosa altra—oder t'ing. You hear of de Gentle Shepherd? Eh dios! Dat vas Don Diego. 'E look like de lamb—he be de tigre."

And Pedro made the most ferocious faces, while Kate sat on her horse amazed, thinking:

"And this is the man I despised as a weakling coward."

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. PACHECO.

MULEVILLE was all astir, lively as ever, expectant of the assembly convention, when Judge Brown rolled out of bed in the morning, to perform his day's work according to instructions.

His mind was much more at ease than it had been the night before, when he had been left alone by Shepherd. True, he had then succeeded in partially drowning his fears in the bottle; but in his drunkest moments he had been conscious of the fact that they still lay at the bottom of the glass, and would reappear as soon as the fumes of the whisky cleared away.

He had to fight the Rancher's League all alone, and he knew that it would be sure to come up to time next day, at the call of the convention, eager for revenge and provided with any number of shooting desperadoes.

And the poor judge, in his fat and shattered nerves, was sure he should collapse as soon as the shooting began.

Now all was changed.

He was no longer the principal; but another man, the very one who had beaten Tom Johnson the day before by a trick, was to take the brunt of the fighting for him.

The judge was considerably reassured by the thought, and sent for the three delegates at once, to whom he said:

"Gentlemen, the time has come when the gallant cowboy is about to show what stuff he's made of, and I feel that I am not the candidate for your crowd. I'm not on the shoot. I'm only a lawyer. I'm going to decline in favor of Mr. James Arthur Shepherd, and I hope you'll vote for him, as you would have done for me at to-day's convention."

"And who in Halifax is James Arthur Shepherd?" asked Conky Joe. "Ef it's the Gentle Shepherd, I'm agreeable; but we don't want no strangers hyar."

"This gentleman was here yesterday," replied the judge, "and it was he who scared away Tom Johnson. I don't know whom you mean by the Gentle Shepherd, but this man is very gentle, I'm sure."

"Well, jedge, if you say it's all right, I s'pose it is," said Scarfaced Jake. "I bain't seen the Gentle Shepherd since a year agone, but if he's givin' to run this convention, we'll jest swoop the Rancher's League and swaller the Pool dry."

So matters were settled, and the judge went to breakfast, it having been arranged that he should go to the convention himself as a delegate, and present the new candidate's name in a glowing speech, for which Scarfaced Jake furnished him with the necessary facts as to the career of the Gentle Shepherd.

But Muleville was not destined to take a quiet breakfast that day; for the judge had not got fairly into the middle of his first steak—a tough one at that—when a brisk rattling fusillade was heard outside the town, and Slippery Joe, one of the most noted bummers of the town ran into the breakfast-room of the hotel, yelling:

"Get yer weepins, and pile out. The Rancher's League's a-comin', with more'n a million cowboys, on a reg'lar tear."

Then out he rushed, and all Muleville flocked into the streets, to see a great cloud of dust coming from the plains outside, with flashes sparkling from the midst thereof, ghostly forms shooting to and fro in the yellow haze, while the shrill whistling of bullets over the houses told that the cowboys were coming in their usual fashion when "on a tear."

But Muleville was not to be taken by surprise so easily on a convention day. An ordinary "tear" might find her unprepared; but she

had not earned her name for "liveliness" in a ten years' course of cemetery-filling, without a full sense of her responsibility to the spirit of Western society.

In less than two minutes Muleville was "out," with Winchester rifles, shot-guns, revolvers, and an arsenal of weapons of every variety, firing back an answer to the random volleys of the approaching cowboys, and sending the whole gang to the right about with a suddenness that argued plenty of prudence behind the noise.

No one was hurt on either side so far, but Muleville was triumphant, and celebrated its victory with tremendous yells, while outside the town Tom Johnson, with some two hundred men of his own kind, cursed in his choicest language and remarked to his boss:

"We'll hev to git more men, boss. We hain't stampeded 'em, and ef we want to run that convention we've got to *fight*."

He addressed Mr. Luis Pacheco, a fine, handsome young man, of dissipated appearance, who seemed to be very much amused at the whole affair, and who answered him:

"Well, Tom, this is excitement. By Jove, it beats draw poker at fifty dollar ante. Get all the men you want. They can't hold the convention till we get our delegates in. We've the majority anyhow, haven't we?"

"Majority be durned!" answered Tom scornfully. "Muleville kin set up all she wants as delegates and make out credentials too, if we don't git in. We've got to git in. Consarn their pictur's, why didn't the boys come? I wanted five hundred, and we hain't got two. Bill Travers hain't come; nor Macdonald's men."

"Macdonald doesn't belong to the Pool. He's a new-comer," observed Pacheco.

"New-comer be durned. He's got to come in or fight. I say we make a sweep of the ranches. We've got time to do it afore the convention meets, and ef they try any gum games, we kin hold a convention of our own and nominate you anyhow."

Here one of the men on the outside of the crowd yelled excitedly:

"Hyar come the boys to help! We've got 'em now. Hoorar fur our side!"

Another cloud of dust was to be seen approaching at a rapid pace, and the huge form of Bill Travers was ahead of it, coming at a gallop toward Pacheco, waving a red silk handkerchief.

The cowboys raised a wild exulting yell as they recognized Bill's form, and Tom Johnson shouted:

"We're all right now, boys. We'll clean out Muleville in the crack of a whip."

Suddenly Pacheco caught him by the arm and pointed to the cloud.

The young rancher's face had lost its look of careless confidence. He seemed to be worried and downcast all of a sudden, as he ejaculated:

"Look there! By heavens it's the *Queen of the Ranchers*. I didn't think she'd dare come out."

Tom Johnson stared, and there, sure enough, not far from Bill Travers, was the figure of a lady on horseback, familiar to them all, while the crowd of horsemen behind, numbering about a hundred and fifty men, had halted and formed into line, facing Pacheco's troop, like soldiers on parade.

At the same time another cowboy called out excitedly:

"Hyar comes more on 'em. Look, boys." On the other side of Pacheco's troop another cloud of dust was approaching and at the head of it rode Macdonald of Bushwhacker's Creek, with a small gentleman beside him, dressed in black, and apparently unarmed.

"Take the men out of the way," said Pacheco, hastily. "We don't want to get into a cross-fire. Skip, bo's."

And the whole troop stampeded for a quarter of a mile, while the men of Muleville watched the mysterious doings on the plain outside with much curiosity, speculating on what it could all mean.

Then at last the dust cleared away, as the three bodies halted, and Macdonald rode out from his troop, which numbered about fifty men.

He had stuck a white handkerchief on a stick, and was accompanied by the small man in black, as he rode toward Pacheco, who on his part advanced to meet him with Tom Johnson and a similar flag of truce.

The third party, headed by Bill Travers and the Queen of the Ranchers, remained quietly watching the proceedings, all three troops being out of pistol-shot of each other.

Pacheco took off his hat politely, and saluted Macdonald, inquiring:

"What is the trouble, Mr. Macdonald? Are you going to the convention with us or against us?"

"I am going there with a candidate for the nomination," was the cool reply. "Mr. Pacheco, Mr. Shepherd, the cowboy candidate for assembly, better known in these parts, from his mild and quiet disposition, as the Gentle Shepherd."

Pacheco looked very hard at the small man

in black, who returned the gaze with a placid smile, as the rancher said:

"I am happy to meet the gentleman. Is he to be the candidate?"

Shepherd took off his hat.

"I have that honor," he answered. "Judge Brown, of Muleville, I understand, is the third man, and we shall have to let the convention decide on our claims."

Tom Johnson, on his part, had been staring at the little man, and now ejaculated, with a coarse laugh:

"Oh, Halifax and sweet potatoes! this ain't the Gentle Shepherd, boss. I know this feller. I whipped him two years ago, and I'd ha' done it again only yesterday, if he hadn't put like a streak. Say, Mac, you can't come no such games over us. The Gentle Shepherd's a *man*, he is; he ain't no boy like this one."

Macdonald laughed.

"You'll find out whether he's the Gentle Shepherd before this day's over," he replied. "In the mean time, he's in the field to stay, and if Judge Brown runs too, we've got to make some arrangements for order in the convention."

"How many delegates do you claim?" interrupted Pacheco. "Tom Johnson, you keep still. Too many cooks spoil the broth. How many delegates do you claim, Mr. Macdonald?"

"Two, for certain; and we're going to try for a majority."

"Very well. I've nine pledged to me, and eleven is a majority. You see you have no chance. I'll give you five hundred apiece for your delegates, and we'll have no trouble. I don't want any difficulty with any man."

"You have grown peaceable lately," the little man in black remarked. "I have heard, Mr. Pacheco, that you used to settle difficulties in a different way."

Pacheco returned him a haughty stare.

"I was not addressing you, sir."

"Very true. But I am speaking to you, and intend to be heard. I decline your proposition to sell out."

"It was not made to you, sir. I don't know you. I do know Mr. Macdonald. He is a responsible man, and too wise to try and buck against the League. That body of men out yonder belongs to the League, and you have no chance."

"Pardon me," again interposed Shepherd, regardless of the fact that Pacheco was speaking to Macdonald, with a pointed disregard of the presence of a third party, "you are misinformed as to the troop out yonder. Miss Wallace is not in the League, and I judge Mr. Carroll must have left it, or his men would not be with the Queen's Ranchers."

Pacheco pretended not to hear him, and went on to Macdonald:

"Come, Mac, you don't want to buck against your own party, do you?"

"I have told you already that I came here with my friend Shepherd to stay. Now, then, have you any proposition to make looking to a fair and orderly convention, or is this to end in a free fight?"

Pacheco hesitated. But for the third party, watching them so grimly, he would have tried bullying; but he did not know yet how the third party stood.

"I'm willing to close with any fair offer, but I stand on my rights," he said at last. "What do you propose?"

Macdonald turned to Shepherd.

"Speak out," he said. "It is time."

Shepherd looked Pacheco in the eye, and the latter met his gaze with his usual haughty, overbearing style.

"Well," he said, "what is it?"

"I propose," said Shepherd, quietly, "that each side dismisses all its men save the delegates, leaves all weapons outside the town, and that we go in on foot, and conduct the convention in the same manner as is done in other parts of the United States. I am a man of peace, or I should not make the proposal."

"I decline it," said Pacheco, shortly. "We in Colorado manage things our own way, and don't take orders from anybody, much less a nobody like you."

As he spoke he squared himself in his saddle and frowned haughtily on Shepherd, who shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"I expected as much. You are used to having your own way, and don't like to give it up. Very well. I'll give you another choice, which I think you cannot refuse if you are the man you were four years ago when you murdered Colonel Wallace."

Pacheco's face whitened perceptibly, and he cast an apprehensive glance over at the figure of Kate Wallace, as he said:

"It was a fair fight. I demanded a trial, and was acquitted by a jury. I have nothing to fear from that."

"Very true, but the gentleman's daughter thinks that your candidacy is an insult to her; and so do I. My proposition is this. Let us select, by lot, twelve men from each side, and fight it out here. The side that has its champions beaten will retire from the contest. Is that fair? It is the same you made to Colonel Wallace four years ago."

Pacheco looked over at Kate Wallace once more, and hesitated again. At last he said:

"Certainly. I can't object to that, of course. But we don't want ladies looking on."

"Pardon me," returned Shepherd blandly. "Not in ordinary cases; but this is a special one. The lady is interested in the result, I imagine. If you doubt it, we can ask her."

"By no means," said Pacheco, hastily. "Let it be as you say. I'll appoint Tom Johnson the leader of my gang. Six is enough on a side. Confound it, men, we don't want to kill innocent men for nothing."

"Six be it," returned Shepherd, calmly. "I shall head my own men, and I am going over yonder to select them."

"Where?" asked Pacheco starting. "Not for the Queen's men?"

"From just those very men, sir, and I'm going alone after them."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SIX TO SIX.

THE little stranger in black galloped away towards the Queen's Ranchmen, while Pacheco turned to Tom Johnson uneasily, whispering:

"It's a put up job. They're all red hot to kill me, or I'd go in with you. Pick the best men you've got, and kill every man on the opposite side."

"You bet," answered Tom grimly, and he went off for volunteers, just as a wild yell of welcome greeted the little man, who had reached the ranks of the Queen's Ranchmen and been recognized.

Kate Wallace was the only person who did not seem to welcome him. On the contrary, as soon as he approached, she walked her horse away, only remaining near enough to hear what was said:

"Well, gentlemen," said the Gentle Shepherd, taking off his hat, "glad to see you all this fine morning. Mr. Pacheco yonder and myself have agreed to a little piece of fun. We are, as you know, both candidates for the assembly nomination, and we are to choose six champions each and fight it out. Who will come on my side?"

Bill Travers, whose swelled eyes had subsided to a beautiful pair of black and green optics, uttered a mighty oath as he shouted:

"I'm with yer all the time, young feller. Count me in."

"And me," "And me," roared fifty more.

"Hold on, boys," cried Shepherd. "I only want six, and Tom Johnson is to head the other six."

"What? Ain't Pacheco in?" inquired Bill Marks in a tone of disgust. "I thought he'd stand up to the racket, anyhow."

"No. Mr. Pacheco is not in," returned Shepherd emphatically. "If he were, I would leave it to you Queen's men to pay off old scores."

Here Kate Wallace turned her horse and cried out sharply:

"My men will stay out of this, if that man is a coward! I forbid a man to stir from hence."

"Thank you, madam," replied Shepherd, with a bow. "I expected no less. Let Mr. Pacheco and me settle our business alone, and if you choose to look on, there is no law to forbid you. Travers, I take you. Injun Tom. Tim the Snipe, Black Owen, and Prairie Pete. Come along and get your weapons ready."

He turned and cantered away, followed by the five cowboys, and found Pacheco watching them with an uneasy glance. He rode up to him and said:

"I have one more proposition to make before this fight begins. Why should the blood of innocent men be shed? Suppose you and I fight it out alone?"

Pacheco shook his head.

"Time enough when my men are beaten. I'll bet ten to one on Tom Johnson. If he's killed, I'll fight you."

Shepherd nodded and rode off.

Then the cowboys gathered into two bodies about three hundred yards apart, with the champions in two little knots midway between them.

Macdonald had joined Miss Wallace, and it was arranged that he should give the signal for a charge.

Then and not till then, the little man in black took his station with the five cowboys, and said quietly:

"Don't fire too quick! Stoop low, and give it to them at short range!"

"Are you ready?" cried Macdonald.

"All ready!" cried back Shepherd, and it was noticeable that he had not yet drawn a pistol, if he had one with him.

"All ready!" roared Tom Johnson, and then a deadly hush fell over the field, as the twelve champions got their horses together and eyed each other eagerly, the animals fidgeting as if about to race.

"Go!" cried Macdonald.

Away went the horsemen full speed at each other, and a lively fusillade began before they had gone twenty yards, the bullets whistling past the ears of the combatants, with more than one sharp slap as the lead struck, followed by a curse of pain and anger.

They were only two hundred yards apart, and ten seconds was ample to bring them together; but the ten seconds were full of death, for each man had two revolvers, and was firing as fast as he knew how. All but the Gentle Shepherd, who had not drawn a pistol yet, but lagged behind the rest, with both hands down by his sides.

Now three seconds have passed, and only a hundred and twenty yards divide them, when the firing becomes a rattle, and Bill Travers throws up his arms and drops off his horse.

Tom Johnson has shot him, and a yell bursts from Pacheco's party as Black Owen wavers and falls next, while the Shepherd's party slackens its pace, appalled and hesitating.

Fatal moment for them, for the others come on faster than before, with a volley and yell. Injun Tom drops at the same time that one of Tom Johnson's aids throws up his arms and falls.

The odds for close action are five to three, and Prairie Pete suddenly wheels his horse and runs, followed by a howl of derision from Pacheco's troop, as Tim the Sioux dashes on alone, to be shot down with several bullets before he can close, leaving the Gentle Shepherd alone on the field, at a canter, not fifty yards from Tom Johnson and the four survivors of the Pacheco party.

And then they see the Shepherd suddenly stoop down in front of his saddle, rise up with a pistol in each hand, and fire a single shot.

With a wild cry, Tom Johnson's next man throws up his arms and drops; the rush ceases, and the Shepherd fires a second shot, dropping another man as neatly as before.

Then a dead silence falls on all parties, as they see the three men waver and halt before one, who passes in front of them at the same easy canter, to all seeming regardless of the bullets, as if he bore a charmed life, till he suddenly fires two more shots in rapid succession.

Then the Mac'onald party raise a yell of triumph in their turn.

Tom Johnson is left alone.

The shots of the Gentle Shepherd have dropped both of Tom's remaining followers, and the bully of the cattle range has turned his horse to flee, with the Shepherd after him.

Tom Johnson has emptied his two pistols and is trying to reload as he runs, but the Shepherd is after him. And what amazes the men is to see that the Shepherd has taken his long quirt and put back his pistols into the holsters from whence he had drawn them, while his horse goes two feet to each one of Johnson's charger.

In twenty yards he is close behind Tom, and they hear the loud crack of the long whip, while a shout of wonder goes up as they see what the Shepherd has done. With a dexterous snap of the whip, he has caught the pistol out of Johnson's hand, taking a piece out of the cowboy's wrist in the operation, caught it in his own hand, and thrown it into the ranks of the Macdonald men.

Then he chases Tom Johnson, who is still trying to reload the other pistol, and makes the long lash take a piece out of the back of Tom's neck, shouting:

"Drop the pistol. Drop it, I say!"

And Tom drops it, and runs as hard as his horse can carry him, while the Gentle Shepherd, his boyish face as calm and gentle as ever, wheels away and rides up to Pacheco, saying:

"Come, sir, come. You have had your plans tried. Now fight it out. I give you another chance to run for Assembly."

But Pacheco has had enough, and his face is pale, as he says:

"No, no; the affair is settled. I give up all claims. You are a better man than I ever thought of being. I retire."

Shepherd smiled a little disdainfully.

"I thought you'd make a better fight, Mr. Pacheco. But there remains a little score to settle yet. Mr. Macdonald is my friend, and you were pleased to say that he could not buck against your terrible Rancher's League. Do you propose to threaten him or me? If so, here is the place to settle it."

Pacheco's face flushed slightly.

"Oh come, come," he said. "Don't rub it in too much, Shepherd. You're a good man, but even you can't fight the League. You can get the nomination; but we shall fight the election, of course. That's a very different matter to any claims to nomination by the convention. You can't prevent my running independently."

"Pardon me," returned Shepherd gravely. "I both can and will. You came here to carry things with a high hand. You refused my fair proposition to enter the town unarmed and have order. Now, sir, I shall hold you to your compact, and compel you to keep it, or you and I settle it here and now."

Pacheco looked at him amazedly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you must pledge your honor not to run for Assembly, or you and I fight. It is an insult to a lady whom you have wronged even to dream of such a thing, and you must retire from the race or die."

Pacheco put his hand to his hip instantly, for he was no coward, saying:

"Very well, sir, but I warn you the League

will make you pay for this. You can't fight Sangre Cristo county and twenty millions of dollars."

Shepherd pointed his finger at him.

"That is just what I wanted you to say. Now I tell you openly, Mr. Pacheco, I have come into this county on purpose to break up your confederacy, and I intend to do it if I have to call you out, one after the other, and kill every man in the League. Take your place. I'll give you first shot. No talk. The time has passed for that. Defend yourself."

Pacheco instantly drew his pistol, but before he could cock it there came a bullet from the Shepherd's derringer, which he had been holding in his hand unseen all the time, and which shattered his wrist and sent the pistol flying.

"Now go home, unless you can shoot left-handed," said Shepherd sternly. "I mean business to-day. Run now if you dare, for I swear I'll kill you on sight if I see one of your ballots in the county. Good-by."

And away he cantered, leaving the young rancher with a shattered wrist, while his men, seeing what had happened and thoroughly cowed, began to sneak away over the plain to distant ranches, regardless of the jeering yells of the Mulevillians, who understood well enough that there was a spirit among the ranchers, from which they were certain to derive benefit.

Then Shepherd rode up to Macdonald, whom he found talking to Miss Wallace.

"I am going to the convention now," he said. "We shall not need any force with us. Send your men back. I am not afraid to go to Muleville alone, if you don't care to accompany me."

He did not so much as look at Kate, though she could not keep her eyes off him in a singular stare of mingled terror and admiration.

"Indeed, I couldn't think of staying away. I'm going with you," said Macdonald: "and I may as well tell you what Miss Wallace has just been telling me. Her delegates are instructed to vote for you."

Shepherd bowed frigidly.

"I am much obliged to any friend who assists me," he said, "but I don't think that ladies are altogether in place in politics, Macdonald. My ideal of a lady leaves such things to the men, and stays where she is supreme in the home circle."

Macdonald could hardly avoid laughing at the face of Kate Wallace as she listened to this speech.

She crimsoned deeply, her eyes flashed with anger as she gave her horse a cut with the whip and galloped away, giving an imperious sign to her men to follow.

Shepherd looked after her with a faint smile, and said to his friend quietly:

"You asked me once why I stood so much from somebody. You will begin to find out before election day. Will you go now? We shall not want any more than the delegates."

Ten minutes later a troop of only fourteen horsemen, riding slowly and peacefully, had replaced the crowd of cowboys that had been threatening to "clean out" Muleville, and the gallant citizens of that lively town welcomed them with yells as they came in, and escorted them up to the Metropolitan Hotel, where they were received in great state by Judge Boanerges Brown, who made the speech of greeting from a horse-block, amid a jubilant crowd of Mulevillians, who had taken their cue with great readiness.

"Feller-citizens," cried the judge, waving his arms, "this air the proudest day Muleville has yet seen, and we glory in the spunk of our citizens. Muleville has met the enemy and they are ours. The high and mighty potentates of the despotisms of Europe cowers this day on their thrones, shakes in their diamond-buckled shoes, and shivers so that their crowns is ready to drop off into the mud of Muleville, to be trodden under the iron heel of the gallant cowboy candidate. This day we have met the pride of the Rancher's League, and sent them scooting over the dust of the illimitable prairies, quailin' before the honest wrath of the men of Muleville."

Cheers interrupted the speaker, who took a fresh breath and went on:

"Men of Muleville, you have this day seen what kin do done by a free people to shake off the shackles of slavery, and now you air about to choose for yourselves a man fit to beard the lion in his lair, to lick up the Rancher's Pool as if 'twere a mere two fingers of apple-jack and not know you'd be'n a-drinkin' any'ing."

Renewed yells greeted the illustration so truthful to the mind of Muleville, and the judge continued:

"Feller-citizens, we're a-caucussing now, and we want to know who we air to be for our next representative in the State Assembly. Here under the shadde of old Baldy, with the vast multitudinous silence of the unpeopled plains around us, with the blue sky of freedom over our heads, we're a goin' to call on the Spirit of Liberty to erect he' altar right here in solid old Muleville, the home o' freedom. Come down thou immortal spirit, wrapped in the stars an' stripes, gluin' in the red rays of the

settin' sun! On one side floats the spirit of Thomas Jefferson, a-wavin' in his mighty hand the Declaration of Independence; and on the other strides the martial form of Andrew Jackson, arm-in-arm with George Washington, flourishing their swords in time to the music of 'Hail Columbia,' and hollerin' the motto, 'Muleville shall and must be free! I see 'em a comin', and I see before us the promise of a glorious future fur Muleville, when we'll hav a bank and a county jail, and a big stun court-house, and gas lamps in all our streets, when the wives of our gallant citizens will rustle in silks and diamonds, when whisky will be three cents a drink, and the landlords will turn their backs while our citizens fills up their little horns; when we'll hav a rale theayter, and the skirts'll stop here onst a week; when we'll hav cock-fights every evening, and dog disputes a-Sunday afternoons. I see all that a comin' in my mind's eye, feller citizens, and I'm gwine to introduce to you the man as will give us all these things in the future. Feller-citizens, you see that little man on the hoss thar. That's James Arthur Shepherd, the cow-boy candidate fur Assembly, and don't you forget, when you come inter the convention."

Thunders of applause greeted the judge as he retired, flushed and triumphant, and all Muleville rushed into the big barn where the convention was to be held, where the proceedings were rushed through at railroad speed.

Muleville conventions, as they appeared in print in the *Pioneer*, were orderly and regular, with a chairman and at least a dozen vice-presidents and secretaries; with resolutions and nominations passed in due course, and all that sort of thing.

The actual Muleville convention, as it appeared to Macdonald of Bushwhacker's, who watched it curiously, was a pandemonium of noise and confusion outside, no one attending to what was going on, while a few men on a platform went through a pantomime with papers, chairs and tables, which seemed to satisfy every one as well as if they heard the speeches.

Occasionally Judge Brown would yell:

"All who are of that opinion say aye."

Immediately Muleville responded with a roof-splitting yell, amid which the judge mumbled:

"Contrary, no; carried. Next resolution."

And so the convention proceeded, till the men on the platform all rose and stood side by side, with their hats off, as the judge again advanced to the front and roared over the tumult:

"I declare James Arthur Shepherd to be the unanimous choice of this convention, and I have the honor to introduce him to you. Gentlemen, Mr. Shepherd."

Then for the first time came a hush over the assembly, as a small man dressed in black came to the front of the platform, and said in a quiet way, but perfectly distinct:

"Gentlemen, my name is James Arthur, and some of you have been pleased to call me the Gentle Shepherd. I accept the call you have given me to-day, but I warn you all that you have only just begun to fight a battle that requires courage. You will have to struggle against the Rancher's League, and that league contains every rich cattle-owner in the State, and owns at least twenty millions of dollars. Are you prepared to fight it?"

Silence followed this plain speaking, till Scar-faced Jake called out:

"We'll fight 'em, if you'll lead us."

The little man bowed.

"If you'll follow where I lead, we'll show the ranchers that the cowboy is the king of Colorado, and that all the wealth a man can acquire will not make him our master. It is the old battle between the people and the rich few, who shall be masters. I stand on the side of the people, and I say that the cowboy, and not the rancher, is the true king of Colorado. We have all heard a good deal of our cattle kings, simply because they are rich men. They go to Europe, and live in wealth, while the cowboys take care of their cattle, and work for a bare pittance. I think all this can be changed. We have the votes, and we can rule if we will. The ranchers have made one league. Very well. Let us make another to fight them. Who'll join the Cowboy's League, and promise to stick together?"

"We," "we," "we," yelled the crowd excitedly. "Very well, let us organize at once, and start lodges all over the State. If I am the cowboy candidate, I want the cowboys to know I'm running. We'll start the league as soon as this meeting adjourns, and show these millionaires, as I told you before, that the cowboy is king of Colorado. I m' ve we adjourn."

And adjourn the meeting did, amid much enthusiasm, the cowboys present gathering together immediately after in a secret conclave, the result of which was not seen till several days later, but which was destined to have a great influence on the fortunes of several people in this story.

That evening Macdonald and Arthur rode home together in the moonlight, and the Scotchman said:

"By Jove, old fellow, you're born to be a leader."

CHAPTER XIX.

WHERE'S THE GENTLE SHEPHERD?

Mr. Thomas Johnson made the best of his way from the field of his discomfiture, in a frame of mind the reverse of cheerful. He had been beaten at shooting, and his foe had treated him with ignominy before the assembled cowboys of his section, without his having a chance to revenge himself. He had been compelled to fight his old friend, Bill Travers, and had seen Bill fall from his horse seriously wounded, if not killed by his own shot.

He had imagined he had everything his own way; had actually beaten the other party, driving one man to flight, and having five men remaining against the other, when the Gentle Shepherd had turned the tables on him with a suddenness that almost dazed the cowboy, accustomed though he was to have things reversed by quickness.

Tom Johnson knew himself to be one of the strongest men in Colorado, a desperate rough and tumble fighter, a good shot, and an expert at riding and knife-fighting, yet he had been worsted by one he had called a boy, and whom he felt he could crush in his grasp like a child.

This boy could shoot as he had never seen any one shoot before, and Tom had to own to himself that he had no chance to cope with the Gentle Shepherd in pistol practice.

But he had a saving clause to excuse his defeat to himself, and he used it

"He caught me with both pistols empty, and I was too busy thinking of loading to attend to his whip," he thought. "It warn't a fair trial, and I'll git him yet whar we're even. Consarn his pictur! I won't give away a chance. How he's worked since he come hyar, a green tenderfoot! By gosh, he'll be thinking he's a man, if I don't take the fight out of him somehow."

And thus cogitating, he pursued his way to the Ten League Ranch, amid a crowd of down-hearted men of his following, who had come for wool and were now returning home shorn.

Among these, after he had ridden some distance, he perceived his boss, Mr. Luis Pacheco, looking pale and haggard, his right arm in a sling, as he ambled on, every motion of his horse causing a grimace of pain from the young man.

Tom Johnson rode up, saying:

"By gosh, boss! air you hurt much?"

Pacheco ground his teeth.

"Yes. That little devil has ruined my right arm. It will have to come off. The ball went in at the wrist and it has broken every bone in the arm, I verily believe. It hurts like—"

He broke off with a moan as his horse tripped on a stone, jarring the injured limb, and Tom said, vengefully:

"We ain't done with him yet, boss. He's a smart man, I'll admit; but I ddn't get a fair chance at him to-day. He'll have to go down yet. You see if he don't."

"You'll have to do better than you did to-day if you want to kill him," returned Pacheco, grinding his teeth to repress a cry. "He chased you like a rabbit."

"Consarn him! yes; but I hadn't a shot left. I ain't no man's fool to face a full pistol with an empty one. I'll take keer there won't be no funny business next time, you kin bet. Why, boss, he's the very feller I whipped till he couldn't stir, two year agone. Do you s'pose I'd let him climb over me now? No, by gosh! I'll fix him yet."

"He must be fixed," said Pacheco, with another grin of pain. "See here, Tom, I can't stand this arm much longer. What's the nearest house here? I must get in and send for a doctor."

"The nearest house is Carroll's of Fork Ford, but he ain't to hum. See here, boss; we must get to our own stampin'-ground somehow. Carroll's turned ag'in us, all owin' to the Queen, I reckon."

"I was a fool to run while she lived here," groaned Pacheco. "I thought she'd got over it, but she's as bitter as can be. To think of her coming out here alone among the cowboys. She must be set on it."

"Set on it or not," said Tom, vengefully, "I'm set on whippin' that Gentle Shepherd, I am; and ther' ain't no time better'n now. How many men is there in the League?"

"Fifty-seven ranchers, controlling near five thousand votes," groaned Pacheco; "but I don't know what it's good for now, if this cowboy idea gets out. The men will desert us, and we shall break up."

"Then what we've got to do is to wipe out that candidate afore election," said Tom, vengefully. "You leave it to me, boss. Me and him can't live together. I've b'en king of the cowboys too long to knock under without a fight."

So they continued on their way, plotting vengeance, and in due time arrived at their ranch, where they found the only surgeon in the country waiting, he having been summoned by a cowboy to attend to the injured boss.

He looked grave as soon as he saw the shattered wrist, and announced that amputation was necessary, and that it must be done soon, or the wound was likely to cost the patient more than an arm.

So Luis Pacheco, a young millionaire who had

never hitherto known a cross to his will, found himself a cripple at twenty-eight, with the prospect of a bitter political fight before him, or a crushing mortification, and, to crown his miseries, had a feverish stump to keep him in the house when he knew he ought to have been in the saddle or at Denver.

He was obliged to make Tom Johnson his prime minister in everything, and faithfully did that determined person serve his chief.

Before a week was over the Colorado papers were full of exaggerated accounts of the "assault on our esteemed fellow-citizen, Mr. Pacheco, of the Ten League Ranch, by a gang of rustians who are trying to import into our free and happy country the ideas of the bloody Communists and Socialists of priest-ridden Europe."

The whole strength of the Rancher's League in the State, numbering all the large cattle-owners, was bent at once on carrying the Sangre Cristo county election, by fair or foul means, and naturally began with the press to disseminate calumnies.

And in the midst of all this hubbub from other parts of the State, there came to Denver a quiet little gentleman in black, who visited the different editors and held a private interview with one.

As the result of this interview, on the next day there appeared in the "Patriot" the following paragraph:

"We were favored yesterday by a visit from the Muleville candidate, of whom we have heard so much lately—Mr. James Arthur, better known in Sangre Cristo county as the Gentle Shepherd. The gentleman informs us that he is not a Socialist, as has been represented, and that hereafter, if any speaker of the Rancher's League chooses to make a personal attack on him, that speaker must back his words. We were favored by Mr. Arthur, at our earnest request, with an exhibition of his powers of shooting, which are truly wonderful. We saw him place twelve bullets inside a two-inch ring at twelve paces distance, firing with either hand alternately, in the space of nine seconds, and we are informed that he usually carries eight army revolvers—two in the saddle holsters, two in his belt, two more in his boots, and the others in a place only known to himself, but which we suspect to be under his arm-pits. Besides these, he has a way of producing a pair of derringers out of his sleeves that we never saw before; and we do not wonder that he has earned universal respect. We think the Ranchers will find him a tough nut to crack."

This paragraph was copied far and wide, and from that moment the campaign assumed a bitterness it had not known before. The Rancher's League took it as it was intended, as a challenge to their speakers to abuse the Shepherd if they dared, and Colorado men are not to be lightly dared to anything.

Three days after, the *Drover* had the following article, in which the gantlet was taken up in the following polite and refined manner:

"The Rancher's League means business in Sangre Cristo county, and don't you forget it. To meet the impudent challenge of the nameless rustian who calls himself the Gentle Shepherd and wants to be a legislator, they have set up that sterling citizen and renowned Indian-fighter, Colonel Thomas Johnson, overseer of the Pacheco Ranch. Colonel Johnson visited us yesterday, and as he is sure to be the next member from Sangre Cristo county, we will give a sketch of his personal appearance. Colonel Johnson is a good man, and weighs two hundred and fifty pounds. He has killed twenty-nine men in single combat; can kick a bar nine feet from the ground, carries twelve revolvers, four in his belt, four more in his boots, the rest on his saddle, and can fire the whole seventy-two shots in one minute. He informs us that this boasting rustian who calls himself the Gentle Shepherd is a runaway parson from the East, whom he was obliged to cowhide severely two years ago for impertinence, and that he proposes to repeat the dose as soon as he meets the aforesaid Shepherd."

Below this paragraph appeared the following letter:

"To the Editor of the *Drover*, Sir: I hereby promise to whip the Gentle Shepherd out of his boots whenever I meet him. TOM JOHNSON,

"King of the Cowboys."

Naturally the issue of the *Drover* with these letters was eagerly bought up, and public excitement was on tip-toe for a forthcoming fight.

Yet days passed on and the Gentle Shepherd made no sign of his existence, till the League announced a series of barbecues, with whisky on free tap, in Sangre Cristo county, at each of which barbecues Colonel Thomas Johnson would appear on the platform, ready to meet the Gentle Shepherd and argue the case with him before all the people.

And still the Shepherd made no sign.

The day for the first of these barbecues was set a week before election, and the last was to be held the night before the eventful day, in the lively town where the Shepherd was supposed to have his stronghold, Muleville itself.

The Ranchers had taken their steps well, and had used their money to good advantage. Even the stern virtue of Muleville cannot always be expected to be proof against the seductions of a barbecue and free whisky, set up on a scale they had never known before, even at election time.

For the Rancher's League had promised to roast six prime oxen, fattened for the occasion, and to have as many barrels of whisky on free tap, inviting the whole country to participate.

Muleville could not stand that, even though she claimed to have held the only regular convention, and stigmatized Johnson as the "Bolter candidate."

For a few days there was talk of not letting the Ranchers come in, of staving the whisky barrels and burning up the beef, but as the day came nearer the virtue of Muleville began to quiver and wax faint, casting longing glances toward the barbecues in other parts of the county. Then came a time when the younger citizens would sneak out of town in the night, and ride across country to visit the barbecues, to be received with uproarious welcome by the feasters there, who were reinforced by crowds of the richest men in the State, hobnobbing with the cowboys to get their votes, and all crying down the Gentle Shepherd as a fraud, who had not dared take up Tom's challenge.

And at every barbecue they had a platform, on which Tom Johnson made his appearance regularly, bristling with weapons and trailing a long black quirt from his wrist, as he advanced to the front and made a single speech.

"Feller-citizens, where's the Gentle Shepherd? Is the Gentle Shepherd here? Where is he? Has any one seen him? I want to see him. I'm longin' to see him. I want to argy with him, dodrot his white liver! I'm Tom Johnson, king of the cowboys, and I kin whip any man in Colorado. Bring on your Gentle Shepherd, and I'll jist wipe the platform with him. I'll eat him alive. I was raised to eat jist sich fellers. Whar is he?"

And no one answered his vaunts either at the first, second, third or any other of the barbecues outside of Muleville, so that the Johnson party kept growing and growing, and the Shepherd party dwindled daily, outside of Muleville.

And in all this time no one had seen the Shepherd.

He was heard of occasionally out on the range among the cowboys, never near a barbecue, and there were singular rumors that something was going on in the nature of a secret society, but all that could not help him while he was nightly being defied and insulted and yet had not come forward to punish the offender, if he were able to do it.

Even Muleville began to lose faith in the Shepherd, and to make fun of his black coat and white necktie, calling him by his former name of Parson Jim, and insinuating that he had lost his nerve and that the Rancher's League had cowed him. And so at last came the day before election, and Muleville beheld, not only without hostility, but with positive affection, the advent in the afternoon of a train of well-dressed gentlemen, accompanied by cowboys driving in a huge wagon loaded with barrels and drawn by six mighty oxen, decorated with flowers.

Muleville turned out to welcome the wagon and shake hands with the affable gentlemen all of whom were armed to the teeth but smiled in the most cordial manner, and the oxen were taken out of the wagon in front of the "Rancher's Home," while the whisky barrels were unloaded and the wagon itself chopped up by hundreds of willing hands to start a huge bonfire.

And then the cowboys began to stream in from the country around, and Muleville found itself shouting drunk on Rancher whisky, tearing off chunks of barbecue beef and yelling for Tom Johnson, King of the Cowboys, as loudly as they had done a few days before, for the Gentle Shepherd.

And in the midst of all this row and confusion, Tom Johnson and Pacheco rode into town, cheered to the echo.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SHEPHERD COMES.

TOM JOHNSON looked unusually bluff and elated that night, and Pacheco had so far got back his strength in three weeks that he was able to ride out and take the air.

That evening he was warmly welcomed by his brother ranchers, who got him up on the platform and told him:

"It's all fixed now. We've got the other man demoralized, so he daren't come up; and Tom Johnson resigns in your favor to-night."

Pacheco looked round at the crowd, a sea of heads in the firelight, the whisky flowing freely and everybody jolly.

"Has any one seen or heard of Carroll or the Queen's Ranch?" he asked of his next neighbor, a heavy stock owner, called Jenks.

Jenks shook his head, and whispered:

"Don't mention them here. The sympathy racket might hurt you. Between you and me, the boys are not more than half-hearted in the work as far as fighting the Queen's concerned; for half of them are in love with her; but we can't let our own men dictate to us who shall represent the county. Carroll hasn't been to one of our meetings, and Macdonald has refused to join the league."

"And what would you have done if the other man had come to the meetings?" asked Pacheco.

"Done!" said Jenks with a significant grin. "We're all ready for him. He'll be riddled with bullets before he gets a chance to draw. We're just waiting for him."

Here they heard a faint cheer on the outside of the town, and Pacheco started nervously.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Oh, I suppose some more of our men coming in," said Jenks indifferently. "They're all Johnson men to-night, and they'll be just as hot Pacheco men after Tom's speech."

The cheering on the outside of the town became louder, and people on the edge of the crowd began to run off into the darkness to find out what was the matter.

Pacheco stirred uneasily.

"I wonder what that is?" he ejaculated.

Jenks laughed.

"Nothing, man, nothing. Don't be nervous. I tell you we've got everything our own way. We'll send off a man to report if you like. Here, Johnson. Send off a man to find out what that noise is about."

He spoke with the careless superiority of a large cattle-owner; for Tom Johnson, with all his bluster before the crowd, knew who was at his back and could be obsequious enough to the rich rancher.

"All right, sir," he answered. "Here, you Bill Stevens, Google Eye, I mean, jest climb on your critter and find out who's coming to the meetin'. Tell 'em to dry up, so's I kin speak to the boys."

Google Eye galloped away, the noise growing louder as he went, and the crowd began to melt away on the outskirts, till quite a perceptible decrease had taken place, the distant shouting seeming to be confined to a single locality in another quarter of the town, where they could see the glare of a bonfire just started.

Pacheco became more and more uneasy.

"I'm sure something is going wrong," he said. "Tell Tom to hurry up, make his speech and adjourn the meeting. There's trouble over there. See how our men are drifting away."

"No wonder," said Jenks: "they've drank all the whisky and think there's more over there, I suppose. Come, Tom, get out and speak your little piece."

Accordingly Tom Johnson stepped to the front of the platform and roared:

"Feller-citizens, I've had enough of this here 'lectioneerin', and it don't suit me. Mr. Pacheco's my boss, and I've only been a-runnin' this campaign to save him, he bein' sick, with his arm took off. You know me and you know him. He's a good man and a gentleman, and that whisky's hisn, every bar'l. I resigns in favor of Mr. Pacheco, and I ax ye to vote fur him as if he were me. Now then, where's that ere Gentle Shepherd we've heern so much about? I want to see him and wipe the platform with him. Where is he?"

He paused, in the expectation of hearing the usual silence, when he was surprised by a voice calling out:

"The Gentle Shepherd's here, Tom Johnson, and waitin' fur ye at the other fire."

In a moment every rancher on the stage had started up, pistol in hand, and Jenks cried:

"Who said that? Where's the man?"

No answer came to this query, but a loud cheer went down the street, and the men on the outskirts of the crowd began to laugh, while a perfect stream of them slouched off, with their hands in their pockets, making for the other fire.

"It can't be," whispered Jenks to another of the League, called Strother, "that the fellow has really dared to come. If he has, there's no help for it. He must be wiped out."

"Ay, ay," said Strother in a low tone, "and the sooner we do it the better. Where's Tom Johnson? He'll have to go as the figure-head. Confound it. They've stolen a march on us. Where's Tom Johnson?"

Tom Johnson was found, but his bullying swagger seemed to have departed from him at the unexpected answer to his boast.

The Gentle Shepherd was there at last.

And Tom did not appear so anxious as he had been to meet the Shepherd.

He had expected that personage to come to him in the middle of the Rancher's League, with all the chances in Tom's favor, and now the tables were turned.

Tom had to go and see the Shepherd in the neutral town of Muleville, and Tom was not so sure but what his forces, even with the Rancher's League behind them, might be unequal to the task of wiping out the troublesome candidate.

To be sure there were representatives of thirty large ranches there on the platform, with a body guard of fifty cowboys, but this force, while sufficient to "fix" the Gentle Shepherd, had been rash enough to face it alone, was not enough to clean out Muleville.

And Muleville, having finished the whisky of the Rancher's League, was impartially desirous of trying the brand furnished by the other party.

Before the Ranchers had finished their hurried conclave, half Muleville was on its way to the other fire, and a black mass of human bodies blocked up the street, while the League found itself alone with its body-guard of cowboys by a deserted platform, in front of the hotel known as the Rancher's Home.

"Where's Tom Johnson?" asked Strother. "Come on, gentlemen. This is only a game of

bluff. We're bound to win. Where's Tom Johnson?"

But, strange to say, no one answered.

Tom Johnson, big as he was, had actually made himself small and had disappeared from sight.

"Never mind looking for him," said Jenks hurriedly. "He's lost his nerve I suppose. Come on, gentlemen. We can't afford to be beaten."

And the rancher started off down the street toward the other fire with his friends, every man carrying a pair of revolvers hanging by his side, hidden by the loose poncho he wore to fend off the evening air.

They walked slowly and fell naturally into a sort of military air, the rich men in front, for a wonder.

They were all very pale, as they began to realize that they had been duped in some manner, but they were determined not to give up without a struggle, and they were men of brains and force too, or they could not have attained to their position in Colorado.

There were nearly forty of them and each had brought with him a groom to hold his horse so that the party was not far from a hundred with the few men of Muleville that still stuck to them.

They went on foot in a line across the street and saw the black crowd before them with the red glow of a huge fire in front of the Muleville Metropolitan Hotel, while the stentorian tones of a stump speaker came toward them on the night air.

"It's Bo Brown," whispered Jenks to his neighbor Strother. "The old bloat won't fight. I told you it was a game of bluff. Come on, gentlemen."

They went on till the judge's tones were distinctly audible.

"Feller citizens," he was saying, "the time has come when we stop talking and begin voting. To-morrow morning is the time, and the cowboy candidate expects you all to do your duty. Too long have we been trodden under foot by the iron heel of a grindin' monopoly, and now the gallant cowboy has riz in his might and demands a square deal every time. You have all heard how Tom Johnson has been cavortin' round the county, hollering fur the Gentle Shepherd. Well, feller-citizens, we ain't minded him. Them as knows the Gentle Shepherd knows he's ready to argue the question when the time comes. He's here to-night to speak fur himself, and I call on him for a few remarks."

"Get ready, boys," whispered Jenks. "Shoot him down as soon as he shows his head. Forward into the crowd."

The ranchers quickened their pace to a run, when they were startled by a voice from the crowd ahead, crying:

"Round up! The herd's in corral!"

At the same moment out of the shadow of the houses all round them and from the crowd in front, started a perfect circle of masked men, in cowboy dress, each man leveling a rifle, while a clear, sharp voice cried out:

"Throw up your hands, gentlemen! We mean business!"

There was something in the suddenness with which the maneuver was carried out, in the fact that all the men were masked, and that the weapons were rifles, not pistols, which awed the ranchers in spite of themselves.

They were completely surrounded by a crowd twice as numerous as their own and even Jenks saw the uselessness of resisting.

With a bitter curse he held up his hands with the pistols in them, and the voice cried out:

"Drop the pistols or we fire!"

Down dropped the pistols, rattling on the road, and the menacing voice went on, still coming from behind the crowd:

"March forward into the firelight. Make way for them, boys."

A broad passage was opened up to the side of a huge bonfire, and the ranchers moved sullenly forward, their hands up, for the opposing leader cried out:

"If a man drops his hands, we fire."

A dead silence had fallen on the crowd, and the ranchers found that every face round them was masked, save that of Judge Brown who stood at the edge of a small platform, composed of empty barrels set on end, and beamed down on them in the most benignant way.

"Search them!" cried the voice, and three huge cowboys, all masked, each holding a cocked pistol in his hand, advanced to the entrapped ranchers, pulled them, one by one, away from their party, and searched them for weapons in a manner showing long practice.

Not till the last pistol and knife had been removed and the ranchers left entirely unarmed, did the voice cry:

"That'll do. You can drop your hands."

The tired men dropped them, thoroughly cowed, and a small man in black leaped up on the low platform, and said:

"That is all we require, gentlemen. I hear one of you has been asking for the Gentle Shepherd. I am the Gentle Shepherd. Which of you wishes to argue the question with me?"

No one answered, and he surveyed them with a provoking smile.

"What? All dumb? You made enough noise up the street. Where is the man who calls himself King of the Cowboys? I hear he has been asking for me? I am ready to meet him too. Where is Tom Johnson?"

Here a man shoved his way to the front of the crowd, revealing the face of Joab Appleby, and shouting:

"Tom Johnson's lit out. I jest seen him streakin' it fur hum on his black broncho."

The Shepherd laughed.

"I expected as much. Now, gentlemen, I have a word to say to you ranchers. You are men of education and wealth, with all the comforts of life behind you, and you keep your herdsmen in the condition of slaves, living in hovels. We don't complain of that, but we do complain that you try to coerce poor men by the power of your wealth to vote for men who try to perpetuate a system which makes the rich richer, and the poor poorer all the time. I have gone into this campaign on the side of the poor man because I am poor myself. You have organized against us; we have organized against you. Every man you see round you belongs to the Cowboys' League, and we have a branch on every ranch you hold. Go home and be warned of this. You have seen our power. Don't try to defy it to-morrow or it will be worse for you. You have forfeited your weapons by trying to overawe us. We have turned the tables on you. Your champion, who has assumed the title 'King of the Cowboys,' has shown the white feather. We will read you a lesson in fairness. Go home. You are free to depart, unarmed. Come to the polls in the same way, and we will not attempt to harm you. Try to fight, and you see we have the numbers to crush you. Good-night."

As he spoke he jumped down into the crowd, which began to melt away on all sides, till the ranchers found themselves by the fire, still encircled by the ring of masked men.

Not one of them had spoken a word in his mortification, until Jenks took Pacheco's arm, saying, sullenly:

"We've got the worst of it, Loo, and I'm going home. Come."

Then they filed away down the street, where they found their horses, just where they had left them, and they rode out of the lively town of Muleville, sadder and wiser men than they had entered it.

As they dispersed to their several ranches, some as much as thirty miles away, they came across parties of horsemen, scattered over the plain, going the same way; but whenever they tried to approach them they were warned off by the cry:

"Ware shootin'! Git!"

And after one or two repetitions of this threat, followed by the whistle of a bullet, they concluded it wisest to avoid these parties, and dispersed with the consciousness that none could tell who was in the Cowboys' League.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MEMBER FOR SANGRE CRISTO.

A CHANGE has come over the great cattle range when we see it again. The winter has come and passed with its snows, the cattle have struggled through the fury of the Northers, the spring has come, and once more it is "rounding-up" time. The State Legislature has met and adjourned, after passing various bills against which the ranchers have failed to secure a majority, though every one is directed against their privileges, to protect the poorer class of settlers, who have heretofore suffered all sorts of persecutions from the large cattle-owners. And in all these bills the champion of the poor man has been the new member from Sangre Cristo county, a young man by the name of Arthur, who has shown what is unusual in a Western assembly, a power of temperate argument and an absence of personal abuse which have secured him the confidence of the House.

But the Legislature has adjourned, and the members have returned to their homes, while Arthur has come to his friend Macdonald's ranch, where he now rides about in his old cowboy suit, as the partner in business of the Scotch rancher, with Joel Brunton for overseer.

It is rounding-up time, and politics have been forgotten, while calves are being branded and strays reclaimed.

Mr. William Travers, who has recovered from wounds that would kill any but a cowboy, has come over to assist the Bushwhacker's Creek Ranch in the round-up. Macdonald and Arthur having helped the Fork Forders in their business, and all has been going on well till the work is over and the combined forces of the two ranches meet at supper to talk over the day's job and enjoy a little "eye-opener," furnished by the ranch that has received the favor.

Naturally the conversation among the chiefs of the meeting turned on the "lively times" at last election, and Mr. Travers observed, thoughtfully:

"They say Tom Johnson's layin' low for some one, Shepherd. He goes out on the plains practicin' shootin', and won't drink no more."

reckon he's tryin' to git up his nerve fur another tussle with the Gentle Shepherd."

Arthur nodded.

"I know it. We've not done with each other yet. I knew, the night he rode away from Muleville so quietly, that I should have trouble with him. He has been the bully of the range too long to give up his title of king easily."

"Who called him king of the cowboys first?" asked Macdonald.

"Himself. He has taken the title, and I suppose has the right to wear it, till it is disputed by some one else."

"Why don't you dispute it?"

"Because I've other things to do first. Tom Johnson's time is coming. Let him alone. We shall meet some time on a footing about which there can be no doubt; and then—we shall see."

The Gentle Shepherd's face had grown grave and earnest, and there was a look in his eyes they had not seen there before, and which caused Macdonald to ask rather curiously:

"What is the reason you've not tried him before? You can outshoot him."

"I know it; but that is not what I want to do. A girl might do that."

"Then what are you waiting for?"

"Till I can meet him on equal terms as to bodily advantages. Then we shall see whose will is the strongest."

"Do you think him a coward as well as a bully?" asked Macdonald, in a low voice. "I have thought so."

"You're wrong. The man never gained his title without danger. But courage is comparative. The question with him will be—can he stick when he knows he cannot conquer? Will he die game, or save his life by begging?"

Macdonald shuddered slightly.

"It will be an ugly fight."

"You may be sure of that. One of us is bound to go under."

"And it won't be the Shepherd," observed Bill Travers, dryly. "Tom Johnson was a good man onst, but he's lost his nerve, or he wouldn't have taken water that night he scooted home."

Arthur shook his head.

"Don't believe it. The man saw he had no chance, and his heart was not in the contest on the ranchers' side. Tom is a cowboy, and his friends are all on our side. I tell you he'll turn up when we least expect it, ready to fight."

Bill Travers shrugged his shoulders.

"Mebbe he will; mebbe he won't. If he do, it will be because he's got a job put up to win. Keep yer eyes skinned."

The Shepherd nodded.

"I intend to. What, are you off?"

"Yes. We've got ter help the Queen round up to-morrow. Reckon we'll see ye all that good-night."

And the Fork Forders rode away, leaving Macdonald and Arthur alone, for the men of the ranch were dispersing to their quarters to sleep.

Macdonald smoked his pipe silently for some moments after the place was quiet, and then observed:

"Jim, do you know I think you're a regular thick-headed fool?"

Arthur stared.

"Well, you're complimentary."

"No. I'm not; but I'm frank."

"Exceedingly frank."

"Yes; but you mustn't be offended, for you know I'm your friend."

"True; you've shown me that, Angus."

And the Shepherd held out his hand and shook that of the other warmly, adding:

"You've shown it by deeds, not words. I owe you three thousand dollars yet."

"That's true; but I didn't mean that. I mean you're a fool not to take the fortune that's ready to drop to you."

The other frowned.

"I know what you mean, but that can never be."

"I don't see why not. Kate Wallace is a noble girl. I used to think differently; but she's changed since she found you out. She's become gentle, quiet, womanly and lady-like, and I feel sure she is only waiting for you to ask her."

The Shepherd started slightly and his pale face flushed as he answered:

"You overrate my abilities to please her. She is a rich woman, I a poor man. I cannot afford to be called a mere fortune hunter."

"Then you are ready to sacrifice your own happiness to your pride, not to speak of hers, Jim?"

"I repeat, you overrate me. Kate Wallace does not love me. She admires, perhaps, my success, but I remember too well her bitter words to me when she saw in me only a man of intellect, to doubt that, if I were to go under in some fight, she would transfer her heart, or what she is pleased to call so, to the victor. No, Angus, I am, perhaps, a fool, but I want my wife to love me, not my bodily skill. It is the mind that makes the man, not the body. I have acquired strength and dexterity for a purpose, and that was not to charm a girl."

"Then I say you're a bigger fool than I thought you," retorted Angus crossly. "I believe I'll go for her myself, if you don't."

"All right," was the composed reply. "I

have no objection. Are you going to the ranch to-morrow?"

"Yes. I've promised to help her in the roundup. Why won't you come?"

"Because I've made up my mind not to go there till I can go as an equal."

"You can do that now. You're my partner and a rancher."

"I know I am, on borrowed money. I have not paid it up yet, consequently I am not free."

Macdonald looked vexed.

"I've told you already I don't want to see that money again. Your experience is worth twice that. We've cleared five times that this year, and then there's the mine yet. It may turn out well."

Parson Jim sighed.

"Yes, it may, but Colorado mines are deceptive. Cattle are safer. Well, I wish you good luck at the Queen's. You have a right to court her, for you will be as rich as she in a few years if things go right. Good-night."

Then they went to their bunks, and Angus, who was a good-hearted fellow, admiring his friend sincerely, lay awake a long time revolving plans to bring him and Kate Wallace together, while his own happiness lay in another direction, lighted up by the blue eyes of Nelly Craig, with whom the Scotchman was by this time pretty well enamored.

But he fell asleep before he could hit on any satisfactory plan, and when he rose in the morning found that Arthur had gone away, leaving word that he might not be back for a week, as he contemplated a trip to Denver.

So Macdonald gathered up his men and took his way to the Queen's Ranch, at which he had become a frequent visitor of late, and found the herds all astir, the cowboys driving them in toward the branding corral, while Kate Wallace had more than a score of Eastern visitors, come to see the "rounding up," among whom Miss Nelly Craig was galloping about, doing the honors as an old hand, on the strength of a year's sojourn in Colorado, very severe on "tenderfeet" and very learned on cattle brands and Mavericks.

As for Kate Wallace, she was everywhere, directing, supervising, acting as her own overseer, but no longer, the haughty, impetuous girl of old, scolding her men like a little spit fire, galloping at full speed, so as to use up three horses a day.

She was as active as ever, but had taken on a gentler way of speaking, and yet was obeyed with as much readiness as before, while her manner in the house was graver and more reserved, and she was no longer so free with her admirers, though they were thicker round her than ever, among them Mr. Carroll, of Fork Ford, a rollicking young Irishman, always making violent love to the heiress, who received it with a quiet unconcern that drove Carroll to his wits' end, as it had many another before him.

Angus Macdonald had no time during the day to speak to his hostess, for the roundup kept every one busy, and Kate put all her male visitors, including the "tenderfeet," into positions where they had to work.

When the day's branding was over—and it required four full days to go through the vast herds of the Queen's Ranch—the cowboys of neighboring ranches were quartered near the house, and the chiefs installed in the mansion itself, where the young ladies from the East chattered and flirted with the bearded bachelors, and Angus found himself near Nelly Craig for the first time since morning.

"Well, sir," she said, saucily, "and how many times have you been thrown?"

"Not once till I saw you, Nelly, dear," he whispered back. "I can't keep my saddle or feet either, when you're round me. I say, really now, when are you going to make me a happy man? I've got the house all picked out in Denver, as soon as you say the word."

Nelly colored and slapped him with her fan, calling him a "regular tease," but finally whispered:

"I don't like to leave Kate, Angus dear. She isn't happy at all. It's a terrible load for a woman to own such a large place, with nearly two hundred men to look after. She ought to get married."

"That's just what I've been telling you for months about yourself."

"Of course. But I'm not bearing any load. You're merely asking for selfishness, to have some one to help you. But Kate's different. She needs help."

"Why doesn't she get an overseer?"

"I don't know. None of them seem to suit her. I wish that dear little duck of a Shepherd would come back."

"But don't you know he's moved up higher? His name isn't Shepherd. That was only a nickname. He's the Hon. James Arthur now, and my partner."

"For all that, he's a bear."

"A bear? I thought he was a duck."

"So he was; but now he's a bear. He has not been near the ranch since he was elected, and you know who elected him?"

"Why, himself of course. I helped him a little, but he did the work."

Nelly laughed a little scornfully.

"How wise you are, Angus. As wise as she used to be once."

"I don't understand you."

"Of course not. Don't you know that, if it had not been for Kate, you and your friend would have been beaten?"

"No. Why?"

"Because she went personally to more than one I know, and induced them to keep out of the quarrel. If they had not known she was on his side, and had any other man than Pacheco been his opponent, your smart little friend would have been beaten. She wouldn't let him know it; but I do, and I wish he did, the ungrateful little wretch."

Her words set Macdonald to thinking, and he asked:

"What did she do to help him?"

"She spent twenty thousand dollars, if you want to know. I've seen her check-book. I do wish, Angus, I could see that little wretch and tell him my opinion."

"That's needless. But why do you wish he'd come here? To scold him?"

"Partly, but not altogether. He ought to come here, if he's a gentleman! Kate would like to see him."

"I'll tell him."

"I wish you would. Tell him I say so, and he ought to come, if only to thank his benefress."

Angus turned the conversation, but he sat thinking about it before he went to bed, and it never left his mind till he saw Arthur again.

Then he told him, and the news produced an effect he had not anticipated.

Arthur turned pale and red by turns, and at last ejaculated:

"Are you sure of this? Sure?"

"Certainly. Miss Craig told me."

"And Miss Wallace has forced her help on me, unknown to myself?"

"So it seems."

"Then I shall resign at once."

"Oh, nonsense."

"I mean it. If that is the case I am a fraud. I thought I was elected by the voice of the people. If I have been put in by bribery with her funds I am not fit to be called a man till I have wiped off the stain."

And so saying he ran out to his horse and dashed off, full speed, on the road to the Queen's Ranch, regardless of Angus's calling after him:

"Confound it, man, don't go off at half-cock. You're elected anyway."

But Arthur would not hear him. He had, with all his good qualities, a sensitive vanity that rebelled against obligations to any one, and had been hugging himself with the idea that he had carried the election by the force of his methods alone.

To be told that he owed his election to a woman's help, that, but for her he would have been beaten, hurt his vanity and made him positively angry.

He galloped his horse all the way to the Queen's Ranch, and on his arrival was welcomed with roarings of cheers by the cowboys, who remembered him of old as the Gentle Shepherd.

He rode up to the house and asked at once for Miss Wallace, who sent him word she would meet him in the library, into which he was ushered by Tonio, who was grinning with pleasure to see him again.

He remained there, impatiently awaiting the lady's appearance; but she kept him waiting for nearly half an hour.

When she came in at last he stared at her, more than surprised, bewildered.

Kate Wallace had never looked so lovely in all her life, but there was a gentle seriousness in her manner he had never seen, and her voice was full of tears as she said, reproachfully:

"Have you come at last? It was time."

CHAPTER XXII.

A WOMAN'S HEART.

He could not keep up the coldness he had intended to show before such a soft, friendly greeting, and answered:

"I beg your pardon for the intrusion. I know I have no right to call as a friend—"

She interrupted him still more sadly:

"Is it even so, Jim? Are you so unforgiving as that?"

"As what?" he asked, bewildered.

"As to refuse to consider yourself a friend? I thought you were more noble."

"I—I don't understand you," he stammered, feeling strangely ill at ease now.

"Sit down, then," she said. "I want to talk to you. I must take this opportunity. We may never meet again, Jim. Don't let me feel that yours has been all the triumph of good over evil, that I am a passionate, ignorant country girl, who has thrown away a jewel that can never be replaced. Let me speak out."

He could not help saying:

"Pray speak."

She motioned him to a seat and took one herself, when she began:

"Jim, I used to be very cruel to you in the old-times. I was rude and unladylike. I insulted you grossly. You told me that you could afford to wait for an apology once; and I

scorned you; but you were right and I was wrong, Jim; my pride has all gone. I'm very, very sorry I used to speak to you in the way I did. I treated you as a servant, and you were right when you said I needed a master. Jim, I beg your pardon. Won't you—won't you forgive me for the past?"

"Why, certainly," he said in a low tone. "Every gentleman is bound to do that when a lady asks him."

"But I don't mean that, Jim. I mean won't you *really* forgive me, really and truly, not because it's your duty, you know, but because—because you like me well enough to do it, just as Pedro or Tonio would."

He could not help a smile.

"Yes, I will. In fact, I know you didn't really mean it."

"Oh, but I did, Jim," she said, in the same serious manner; "I did, indeed. You don't know how I hated you then."

"And why?"

"Because you used to sneer at me, with your educated ways, and insinuate all the time that you thought me a fool. I used to hate you—oh, how I hated you! I used to wish some one would kill you."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; but that was before I knew what you were, and why I *really* hated you."

"And why did you *really* hate me?"

"Because I was afraid of you," she replied frankly. "I thought you were trying to make me love you, like every one else, and I was afraid you would succeed. So I hated you for my own safety."

He stared at her amazedly. She seemed not to be ashamed of the avowal.

"Yes," she went on calmly, "I know you think me forward and unladylike; but I'm not ashamed of it now, Jim, because I know you love me, or you wouldn't be so proud and keep away from me so long. I know you'll never marry me, Jim, just because you're poor and I'm rich, and that's the reason I can afford to speak this way to you. There was a time when I would not have dared to do it; but that was when I was ashamed of my ignorance and angry with you. Now I'm quite content to own you're my superior, Jim, and I only ask to be your sister. I don't want to marry you, Jim, dear. I know I have a bad temper, and it would make you very unhappy; but I would like you to be my friend and advise me. I'll do anything you tell me—I'll take your advice always, if you'll only come and see me often and let me help you with my money. I don't want it, Jim, and you do. You have the brains to use it. You ought to be Governor, or President, or something great. I want you to come and live here, to be my teacher, to take care of everything as you used to do, and to consider the ranch yours as much as mine. I've made my will in your favor, Jim dear, and I don't think I shall live long. Won't you show that you forgive me by coming back?"

For the first time since they had known each other, the man looked down and the girl eyed him fearlessly. He was the one confused, she the calm one.

At last he said slowly:

"You don't know what you ask, Kate. It is true that I love you—quite true. I have tried to drive it out, but I can't. But if I come back here as overseer with the knowledge that I love you and you love me, however we may try to disguise it under the name of brother and sister it can only end in one way—either I marry you, and every one calls me for a murderer, or you lose your character through me. It is impossible, till I am your equal in every respect. Then I intend to come and ask your hand in marriage openly, and you can refuse it if you will."

"But you've done that already," she said, quietly. "Don't you remember the night you went away, Jim?"

"What?"

"Don't you remember your last words when I asked you to revenge me on Pacheco?"

"No; what did I say?"

"You said:—There is only one way in which I can help you. Give me the right as your fiancée husband, and I will drive him from Sangre Cristo county. I remember the words well, Jim. I've thought of them often; but not only for revenge. I don't want to kill even Pacheco, now, but I admit I would like to see him gone from the county. I accept your condition, Jim; and it's the first time you've given me an opportunity. You cannot go back on your word, Jim. You have asked me, and I have said yes."

Arthur looked at her in a bewildered way, and at last burst out:

"By heavens, Kate, you've outwitted me. I came here resolved to do all sorts of cruel things to you and myself, and you've shown me that you are my superior in generosity and everything noble. I am conquered. If you will accept me for your husband—"

"I will, indeed, I will," she interrupted in an eager way. "You don't know how tired I am of bossing so many men. It's twice as hard as it used to be."

"Then I am to do no less than give up my pride, and perform my part of the bargain,

Kate. Good-by. When I send you word that I am waiting for you at Denver to be married, will you come?"

"I will," she answered.

"Then good-by," he said again, caught up his hat and went to the door, when she said with a little pout:

"Haven't you forgot something?"

He turned back, came close to her, put both hands on her shoulders, and looked down into her clear dark eyes in a singular manner, saying softly:

"You mean to kiss you, sweetheart? No; I am not good enough for you, after all, Kate. But after my work is done I will try to make you happy. Good-by."

He stooped down and kissed her on the forehead, with the cold touch of a brother rather than the passionate ardor of a lover, and then went out of the room, flung himself on his horse and rode off at a ~~gallop~~ gallop in the direction of the Fork Ford Ranch, leaving Kate dreaming of heaven knows what, with a smile on her rosy lips, and an expression that caused Nelly Craig to exclaim as she came in:

"It's all right, isn't it, Kate? He's not half good enough for you, but I suppose they're all brutes anyhow!"

"Is your Angus a brute?" asked Kate.

"No. He's only a bear; awkward, but as good as gold. And is it really settled?"

"Is what settled?"

"Why, your marriage, to be sure. You're to marry the member from Sangre Cristo, and be called the Hon. Mrs. Arthur, are you?"

Kate smiled.

"Don't talk nonsense."

"It's not nonsense, is it? But I say, Kate, did he say anything about your helping him at the election?"

"No, of course. How should he know?"

"Well, I told Angus, and he told him. I thought he'd come to thank you for it when I saw him ride up."

"He didn't say a word about it."

"Then I wonder what he did come for," said Nelly musingly.

And she never found out, for, as a matter of fact, Arthur had never had so much as an opportunity to introduce the subject.

So affairs went on smoothly at the Queen's Ranch for some days more, and no word came from the absent Arthur, till one day Macdonald rode up to the house for a visit, and was at once cornered by Nelly, who demanded of him where was his partner.

"He has gone to Denver," was the reply. "I don't know exactly what's the matter; but I fear he is getting into bad ways. He went off with Carroll of Fork Ford, and I hear has entered the Rancher's Club of Denver. He can't stand the expense there. Some of those fellows spend a hundred dollars a day, and sit down to play poker at ten dollar ante every night of their lives. Jim can't stand any such life as that long."

Nelly took the report faithfully to Kate, who only smiled and answered.

"I'll trust him. Jim knows what he's doing, and if he's gone to Denver it is for a purpose which he'll carry out."

There was no shaking her trust in the man she loved and whom she had so long and so savagely resisted. A true child of Colorado, with all the panther instincts of her Mexican mother in her; now she had yielded, she bowed down and worshiped James Arthur, and would believe no harm could come to him.

So another week passed away, and then came a letter to Angus Macdonald one fine morning which ran thus in the handwriting of Jim Arthur:

"DEAR MAC:—

"I've made some lucky speculations lately, and am able to pay my debts. Please find inclosed a check for your loan. Do me the favor to go and see Miss Wallace, and ask her for the exact amount of money she expended for my election, to a dollar. I am particular on this point. Send me the items."

"Yours ever, J. ARTHUR."

Macdonald of course posted over to see Miss Wallace, and delivered his message, when she asked:

"Why didn't he write to me? Tell him that if he wants to know that, he must write to me. I shall not tell him anything till he does."

So Macdonald wrote back to Arthur, and received no answer, nor did the Gentle Shepherd write to Kate.

But, within a few days after, Mr. Carroll of Fork Ford came to pay a visit to the Queen's Ranch, and remarked incidentally:

"By the way, Miss Wallace, o'ye know that our little friend the member from this county has struck up a friendship with the man he hates?"

"With—with Pacheco?" she asked, her face turning pale and angry, as it always did at the mention of the rancher's name.

"With that same. And the square part of it is that he doesn't seem to see that Pacheco's getting the best of him."

"How? What do you mean?"

"I mean that Pacheco is a deep one, and bent on ruining his character as a member. Ye know the Rancher's Pool lost the House last

year, through this very man, and they're bound to get it back somehow, by bribery if they can't do it by votes."

"Well, well?" she asked anxiously.

"And Pacheco plays a mighty nice hand at poker in the club, while the new member just knows enough to lose money every night. I tried to stop him once and so did Macdonald; but he wouldn't listen to us, and besides, I must say he has sometimes had wonderful luck to balance his losses. But the end of it will be the ranchers will get him foul in some way, and he'll find he's no match for them. I wish some friend he'd listen to could get him away from there. He's doing no good."

"And why do you tell me this?" she asked, looking Carroll in the face.

The young rancher hesitated.

"I don't know, except that I've heard ye're a friend of his, Miss Wallace, with some influence over him."

"Who told you I had, sir?"

"Well, to tell ye truth 'twas Macdonald, who said ye were engaged to be married to the gentleman, and thought ye might like to know the way he was doing."

"Thank you, sir. I need no information on the subject. I can see through your motives at least, Mr. Carroll."

And from that moment she treated the young rancher with such marked coldness that he took an early hour to leave the Queen's Ranch and went about the country telling his brothers in jealousy how it was a shame to see such a fine woman throw herself away on a little nameless scamp, who hadn't a penny to bless himself with, and was running into debt, hoping to have his obligations paid off with the heiress's money."

For in truth every rancher in the State still wore in the county, hated the Gentle Shepherd more than ever, now they heard he was going to marry the heiress whom they had been courting so long and so hopelessly.

Had he been one of their own kind, a man of money, purse-proud and coarse, with no aspirations beyond display, it would have been different; but, as it was, they all set their faces against him, and a conspiracy was growing up against the Gentle Shepherd, such as he had not hitherto had to encounter, and all the more dangerous because he had begun to move in a grade of society to which he was a stranger as yet.

And meantime Kate, in spite of her brave face in public, began to feel miserable at the long silence of her lover, and finally wrote him a letter in which she asked him to come back at once and see her, as she had much to say to him.

To this letter she received the following answer, three days later:

"KATE:—

"If you cannot trust me now, it is better to know it at once. I sent you a request some time ago by Macdonald, with which you have not complied. I wish to be a free man with no debts, and I understand that I owe you money. Till you send me the particulars, you will not see me. JAMES."

She sat down then and wrote the following answer:

"DEAR JIM:—

"You are too proud. I cannot tell you what you wish to know. If you cannot accept an obligation from me, you do not love me as I love you. There is one man who can tell you, if you ask him, how the money was spent; the man who resigned in your favor. But I warn you that, if you compel me to receive back the money, you and I part forever. I must have my own way sometimes, and you must not be a tyrant over me, just because I am."

"Your loving KATE."

The letter was dispatched, and she waited for an answer, full of conflicting hopes and fears. It came at last in the form of a letter from a totally different person:

"DEAR MADAM:—

"I have been applied to by the Hon. James Arthur for certain particulars which rest in confidence between a lady and myself. I have refused to give them to him without your permission."

"Your obedient servant,

"BOANERGES BROWN,

"Counselor at Law,

"157 Lodge Street, Denver, Col."

And Kate wrote back:

"Tell him what he wishes to know. K. W."

CHAPTER XXIII.

B. BROWN, COUNSELOR.

The Hon. Boanerges Brown, sleek and smiling, dressed in respectable black and fanning sumptuously every day, was a very different person, in his Denver office, from seedy Bo Brown, the impecunious bummer of Muleville.

The judge had taken a fresh start in life since the election, had given up excessive drinking, had practiced law with great apparent success, had pleaded and won more than one cause in the courts, and was the president of three different mining companies, besides doing business in other ways too numerous to mention.

There was an air of conscious dignity on his fat face that showed he had begun to feel assured of his position, and the slang with which he formerly interlarded his speech, to

of selling me out, if Pacheco pays higher. You've cheated Joab Appleby, too, and I shall set him after you if you don't sign a confession. You have tried to put a stain on my name, and it has got to be wiped out, or it will be the worse for you."

"But we've been partners in business so long now," said the judge, "you shouldn't be hard on me."

"We've been partners in square business, and I've no objection to continue it. You have a knowledge of mines that is valuable, and I have a knowledge, too, that has helped us. But, as matters stand, you are in my power, and you must be, if we are to continue partners. Write it."

The judge sighed resignedly.

"You are a regular king: you will have your own way anyhow. Talk about Tom Johnson; it's you ought to be called king of the cowboys. There, there; I'll write it."

And so, with much grumbling, he wrote out and signed a full confession of the way in which he had swindled Kate Wallace at the election, which confession Arthur put in his pocket, saying:

"That is all I want. Now, if Pacheco comes again, after you, deceive him with false information. I have a score to settle with that man yet, which he does not know of, and your help will be necessary to settle it. Good-day."

CHAPTER XXIV.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

No sooner was the Gentle Shepherd out of sight than the judge chuckled to himself:

"He's sharp, devilish sharp, but not so sharp as he thinks. He don't get that money out of me, nor Pacheco neither. I wonder what spite he has against Pacheco. Surely he ought to be satisfied, after taking the man's arm. Pacheco never hurt him, that I know of. By the by, I must be a little careful now. He can shoot, if he has only one arm, and he looked mad enough to shoot when Arthur came in. I—"

Here the judge turned pale and sunk into himself, all aquiver, as he saw Pacheco through the glass door, coming back with his hand in his breast.

The rancher had been waiting till the Gentle Shepherd departed.

He entered the room, sat down, eying the judge sternly, and said:

"Now about that five hundred dollars. I want it back, or—"

The judge heard the ominous clicking of a pistol lock, but summoned courage to say with a smile on his pale face:

"Yes, certainly, you want me to earn it. Couldn't you see I was acting a part? I saw the Shepherd coming in, and I didn't dare let him know we were friends."

Pacheco looked a little more placable.

"In that case, tell me at once what I can do to unseat the man, or drive him out of the country in some way!"

"Well, I should say that's easy enough. It's pretty near time for the annual drive, and he is sure to be at Stocktown with Macdonald's herds. Why not pick a quarrel, with all the chances in your favor? All that is necessary is that he should think you his friend. Even he can be taken off his guard."

Pacheco nodded, but frowned.

"That's well enough, but I don't want any lawyer to tell me that. I want to put a disgrace upon him, not to fight him. I've done that once and got the worst of it. Are you and he friends?"

"He thinks we are," said the judge, slyly.

"Then why not put up a job on him by selling him Little Jane?"

"I can do that, too. In fact, between you and me, he is a shareholder in Little Jane."

"The deuce he is!"

"Yes, don't give it away, Mr. Pacheco, for he's ashamed to have it known; but he really believes in that mine."

Pacheco chuckled grimly.

"Then I'll sell him something. I thought he was a man of sense, but he must be a fool. See here, Brown, if you'll help me to do what I want, I'll say no more about that five hundred, but make it five thousand."

Brown's eyes glittered with avarice.

"You don't mean it?"

"I do. All you have to do is—"

Here the rancher leaned over and said something very low in the other's ear, to which the judge responded:

"Why, of course. That's nothing. I'm an old hand at that. When?"

"To night. Ask for me at the club, and we'll fix him. You say you've done it before. How do you work it?"

"With a cigar, or a pipe, or my watch chain. Any way you please. I've done it when they played for drinks, with their pistols on, and no one ever so much as dropped on it."

"Very well, then. We'll begin by cleaning him out, for a man w' bout money is ripe for buying. Good-day. See you at seven."

He went off, and the judge chuckled to himself and muttered:

"Oh, yes, Mr. Pacheco, I've been there on several occasions; but if you think I intend to

work that little racket for your benefit, you may find yourself in a hole, as they put it here. If there's one thing in Colorado I admire it is the tendency of the western man to stick to his partner, and I'm going to show my friend that a partner in business in Denver may be a partner in other things."

The judge sat down and wrote a short note, which he put in his pocket, and then shut up his office and went for a little stroll toward the mining exchange, where he soon saw Arthur, chatting with different people and known to every one, for a member of assembly is always a popular man in corporations.

The judge nodded to him as he passed, in a careless offhand way, as if to a distant acquaintance; but stubbed his toe on the pavement and almost tumbled over the little man, who put out his hands to save himself from being crushed, and felt the note thrust into it.

The judge apologized with unctuous civility for his clumsiness, and went off, while Arthur soon found an excuse to depart also and peruse his note unseen. He laughed to himself as he read it, and tore it up into small fragments, then sauntered away toward the rooms of the Rancher's Club, where he had lately become a frequenter, and where, in the midst of gorgeous, not to say ostentatious furniture and carpets, the cattle lords of Colorado won and lost fortunes in a single evening.

He was greeted with a certain insincere jocularity which he understood well, for all the ranchers knew and hated him, though they were afraid of his renown as a pistol shot and Strother said:

"Hallo, Shepherd, coming to get shorn?"

"As long as I deposit the fleece, I don't see why I shouldn't," he answered shortly; for the gentleman who spoke had an insolent way of bluffing with large sums of money at poker, which kept poor men out of the games and had often made Arthur feel the power of his purse.

"Fleece indeed! Not much fleece about you," retorted Strother. "A thousand dollars scares you every time."

"I remember when a good deal less scared you, Strother," returned the Shepherd with a peculiarly irritating smile. "Do you happen to remember Muleville, last fall, how I made you and your friends go home like peaceable citizens and leave your weapons behind? Don't talk too loud, Strother. It does not become you in a room in Denver. Talk to me out on the cattle trail, if you want to talk."

Strother ground his teeth, pale with rage, but did not care to reply, so turned away and said to one of his friends:

"I don't believe in allowing professional fighters in the club. Cowboy manners are not to my taste."

"Rancher manners, according to you," the little man called after him, "consisting in swaggering about with a pocket full of money in Denver, and backing down in Muleville when you think you have it all your own way. If you desire to continue this conversation in this strain, I move we adjourn to the plains, sir. I, for one, am tired of it."

"And so am I," retorted Strother, stung to desperation as he saw that his friends were laughing at the setting down he was receiving. "I don't pretend to shoot like you, but I'll play you bluff all day and clean you out or you clean me."

"Done," replied Arthur coolly. "I'll play you, with a thousand dollar limit, if you dare."

"I'll play you without any limit," was the reply. "What do I care about limits?"

"Very little, except to keep other men out of a game," said Arthur, quietly. "You have a habit of going a million better, and I can't put up any such sum. I'll play you up to a reasonable limit and stake all I have, but I'm not going to let money bluff me off a wager, when the man himself couldn't back me down for a cent."

As the little man spoke he looked up at Strother, who was a large powerful young man with a high temper, and who was at the moment flushed with anger and looking as if ready to catch up his puny antagonist and throw him out of the club window.

In fact Strother would have liked to do it had he dared, but Arthur had both hands in his side pockets, and every Western man knows what that means.

So he calmed down and tried to sneer.

"Oh, very well, I'll play you with a limit if you care for such a picayune game. It will take me about an hour to clean you out I reckon."

Arthur smiled and took his hands out of his pockets, saying:

"I've just five thousand I can afford to lose, Mr. Strother. Come into the card-room. Is there any one else would like to join us?"

"I will," said Jenks, who was also there.

"And I," put in Steve Rankin, a tall, slender young Texan, who was the only soul in the Rancher's Club that had ever seemed to be really friendly to Arthur.

"These fellows are bound to clean us out, Shepherd, and I've been a cowboy myself. I'll back you."

They adjourned to the card-room, which soon

filled with lookers-on, as it always did when the Shepherd was playing.

He had been proposed in the club when he came to Denver by a brother member of the legislature and they had taken him in on purpose to entrap him into something that might damage his career as a legislator.

Treating him with distant civility or insincere politeness, he had known all the time that he was in the midst of enemies, and had been on his guard.

He was always armed and ready to shoot, just as much as he had been among the rough cowboys, though the ranchers made pretensions to civilization and did not wear their weapons outside.

That afternoon Arthur knew, from a certain gloom in the faces of the crowd that surrounded him, that they intended to get him into a quarrel under a disadvantage if they could, and he took his measures accordingly.

He took his seat with his back to the wall, close to an open window in a corner of the room where no one could get behind him, and where he knew that a broad architrave on the next story window was just below him, with a piazza roof under that again.

He had no fears of being shot from the street in broad daylight; but he knew, from the faces of the ranchers in the room, that a quarrel was imminent, and that a pretext was easily to be found over a game of poker, with drinks beside the players.

Strother took his seat opposite the Gentle Shepherd, Jenks on his left hand, by the window, Rankin on the inside by the wall, and the cards were shuffled and dealt.

The deal fell to Rankin who sent the cards flying with a dexterity that showed him to be no green hand at the business, and then Strother began his usual game, by putting down a thousand dollar "blind" while Jenks, in concert, "straddled" it.

"It will cost you gentlemen just six thousand dollars apiece to come in," said Strother, with a sneer he did not conceal, to Arthur. "Your little five thousand will look sick before we begin."

Arthur made no reply save to look at his cards, when he drew out his pocket-book, laid six thousand dollar bills on the table, and said quietly:

"I come in, and stand pat. Now then, we'll see whether you have as much brains as you have money. What do you do?"

Strother, a little taken aback by his cool way of behavior, looked at his cards and said:

"I want two. I'm in."

The hands were made up and the betting began. Arthur merely chipped, and the rancher immediately raised him fifty thousand dollars, Rankin going out.

"That is against the limit," said Arthur in his quiet way: "but seeing that you believe in your hand, I'll call you. Here is my money."

And, to the amazement of the rancher, who was bluffing and expected to create a quarrel, Arthur laid down five bills of ten thousand dollars each, and Strother threw up his hand, exposing a single pair of threes as his capital, while the Gentle Shepherd had three queens.

Very slowly the young winner counted over his gains and bestowed them in his breast pocket. He had taken in sixty-two thousand dollars in the first hand, and Strother, used as he was to heavy stakes, began to look more civil and serious.

The next hand was dealt by the Shepherd himself, and brought up some lively work between Jenks, Strother and Steve Rankin, Arthur throwing up his hand after a look.

It ended in Steve Rankin raking in a pool of thirty thousand dollars from Jenks, who tried to smile over it, and began to shuffle the cards in a savage way that showed he was out of temper.

The third hand produced a different result.

Arthur and Rankin had poor hands, and threw them up, while Jenks and Strother had an animated contest, in which Jenks lost his nerve, when the other rancher, after fifty thousand each had been staked, went a million better, and planked down a bundle of bonds with an oath.

Jenks threw up his hand, exposing four eights in his confusion, and Strother, with a laugh, raked in the pool and said to his companions:

"I'm just beginning to play, boys. I did that on ace high."

The Gentle Shepherd had been watching him with quiet scrutiny, and noted with satisfaction that Strother was excited, while Jenks looked troubled, for he had lost eighty thousand dollars that sitting, and he was not as rich as the millionaire Strother.

"Let them fight each other," he thought. "I'll come in presently."

Strother dealt the fourth hand and Arthur came in on a pair of Jacks, which were filled up on the second deal to three Jacks and a pair of sixes.

Rankin threw up his hand early, and twelve thousand dollars was on the table in blinds before the betting began.

Said Strother:

"Well, what do you do, gentlemen?"

"I chip a thousand," said Jenks in a faint voice as if not quite sure.

"See it, and go a hundred thousand better," responded the young millionaire; and out came his bluffing bundle of bonds. "Now let us hear from the Gentle Shepherd, if he has any nerve left."

Arthur smiled and waited till the money was up, when he put down his own winnings and said quietly:

"I call you. What have you got—both of you?"

"Oh, I'm not in," said Jenks, so hastily that it raised a laugh, as he threw up his hand.

"And you don't raise me a cent?" asked Strother, in a tone of disappointment.

"Not a cent; I call you."

"Well, sir, I've a full hand."

"So have I. What's yours?"

"Tens and nines."

Arthur smiled, exposed his hand, and said, as he raked in a hundred and fourteen thousand dollars:

"I thought you were bluffing again. You have taught me a lesson in poker. Do you wish to continue, gentlemen?"

"Not I," said Jenks, rising ruefully. "The luck seems to be against us to-day. I'm going to knock off till night."

And he left the club room with a face the reverse of cheerful.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE EXPLOSION.

At the same moment that Jenks went out, Arthur saw in the crowd the face of Pacheco, and that gentleman came forward to the table, saying:

"I'll take his place, gentlemen, with your permission. I'm not afraid to run against luck or play either."

And it was indeed wonderful to see with what skill he used his single hand in manipulating the cards, as he sat down and took a hand in the game, which went on, with variations of luck, for half an hour longer, at the end of which time lookers-on observed that Strother, in his reckless bluffing, had thrown away nearly half a million of dollars, of which four-fifths was in the hands of the Gentle Shepherd, while Steve Rankin and Pacheco divided the rest.

Suddenly Strother lost his temper, gave his chair a shove back, and said:

"I can't play to-day, curse the luck! I was a fool to sit down with a gambler. The Gentle Shepherd can beat me at cards, and I own up. I'm an amateur; he's a professional; that's all."

A dead silence fell on the room, and every man softly put his hand down on his hip, expectant of a row; but Arthur showed no emotion. He looked up quietly, and began to fold up and put away his winnings, saying:

"I think that you are not quite in your usual frame of mind to-day, Mr. Strother, or you would not think of insinuating things you could not prove for your life."

Strother backed into the midst of his friends, and laid his hand on his pistol, as he retorted loudly:

"I say you play too well for a gentleman, and you can take it up as soon as you please, sir."

"Indeed? May I ask what I am to take up, as you call it?"

"My words, sir, if you like."

"I see nothing in them to take up," replied the shepherd, calmly, while Rankin looked at him amazedly, as if wondering at his self-control. "You must make them much plainer. You say I play too well for a gentleman. Do you mean I win too much money for a square game? Because, if you do, you are mistaken. I have won your money because I've watched your game and know your points. Your face tells your hand every time. You don't know how to play poker."

"You lie!" answered Strother, in a low, bitter tone. "You lie, curse you! Take that up, if you dare!"

This time the pistols were drawn, so that every one might see them, and Steve Rankin started up, crying:

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, consider. In the club-room! We're not on the trail, after cattle."

"Stand out of the way, Steve Rankin," cried the voice of Jenks, from the crowd. "We've got him now, unless you want to get it too. The Gentle Shepherd's got to take water, and you'll see it."

Then Pacheco rose, and said, pleadingly:

"Gentlemen, don't get excited. Mr. Arthur is my friend now, if we did have a little difficulty once. He will apologize to Mr. Strother for insulting him, of course, and it will be all right. Let me speak to you, Jenks."

And he edged off into the crowd, while Arthur remained seated at the table, his face very pale but quite calm, facing some thirty armed men, who were all waiting for some overt act to throw themselves on him.

"Will you allow me to say a word?" he asked in his gentle voice.

Strother laughed harshly.

"He's going to beg, boys. He never knew what it was to be in a corner."

"Pardon me," returned Arthur, in the same smooth, gentle way. "I have been in worse places than this before. I only wish to put it to you all, gentlemen, whether I have given any cause for this wanton attack on me! Do you wish to kill me?"

"Yes," cried Jenks, pushing his way to the front and shaking his revolver. "We are going to kill you, or make you beg. Is that plain, curse you! We've stood your airs as long as we intend to. You're expelled from the club as a professional gambler. I saw you cheating. You have something up your sleeve. Back out or fight. Which is it?"

"Well," returned the little man behind the table, "if that is the alternative, I suppose I shall have to—FIGHT!!"

With the last words he suddenly dived under the card-table, as a perfect hail of bullets rained on it, glancing off in the wall.

The next moment up came the table like a shield, and was thrown over into the crowd, as the active form of the little man leaped out of the window.

Steve Rankin uttered a shout of joy and admiration, but Strother suddenly threw up his hands and dropped, a stream of blood welling from a hole in his chest.

The Gentle Shepherd had shot him and escaped, while the ranchers rushed to the club window and saw him vanish over the edge of the piazza into the crowd in the street, who were all gazing up at the window, amazed at the sound of pistol-shots.

"After that man!" yelled Pacheco wildly to the crowd. "He's murdered Mr. Strother!"

Then they heard the cry in the street, "Murder! murder!" and saw the crowd rush toward the house, in the midst of which tumult came the sudden sound of more shots, and they saw the little man run out to the middle of the street, a revolver in each hand, to where a group of horses stood, patiently waiting for their masters.

"Shoot him down!" yelled the men at the window, and they began to fire at him themselves, the confusion becoming worse confounded than ever.

The pistol-shots struck among the horses and crowd, and answering shots were sent back at the window, by which one of the ranchers got a hole in the shoulder, and all hands beat a hasty retreat and rushed down-stairs.

When they got there the Shepherd had vanished, and they saw him going at full speed down the street, amid the shouts of the crowd, who knew that there was a free fight, but nothing else, not even who was in it.

But Jenks, who was the coolest head among the ranchers, made a short and energetic speech to the crowd of clubmen:

"We've got him now, if we keep it up. He's shot Strother. Shoot murder and get up the hue and cry. We'll have him lynched or drive him from the State."

So they rushed out into the streets and spread the story of how the Gentle Shepherd, a notorious desperado, had been detected cheating at cards, and had shot down an innocent stranger, one of the richest men in the State, and that it was necessary to lynch him, if they did not expect every citizen's life to be at the mercy of a murderous desperado and horse-thief.

In does not take long to get up a cry in Colorado against a horse-thief, and the ranchers knew that. Of course they supposed that the Shepherd had stolen a horse to make his escape, and it was not hard to find a man who claimed to have lost one.

Inside of half an hour from the time the trouble broke out three hundred horsemen were riding out of Denver on the trail of the Gentle Shepherd, while the telegraph was busy all along the line of the railways, flashing the story of the supposed murderer and horse-thief to all parts of the State, with a full description of his person.

He had ridden off as he sat down to table, in his quiet suit of black, bareheaded. He seemed to have been armed, for he had shot Strother with a large bullet from a derringer, and had shown two revolvers in scaring off the crowd that tried to seize him, but that was all they knew about him.

Pretty soon they struck his trail, a few miles out of Denver on the road to the South Park. He had stopped at a cowboy's hut, bought a hat, which the owner had valued at five dollars, for twenty; and had ridden on, saying that he was riding for a wager with a friend.

They pressed on but did not catch sight of him, for the country was mountainous and the distance to be seen not great.

At noon they arrived at another cowboy hut, on a small ranch; where they saw two men cooking coffee; and Jenks, who led the pursuit, rode up to inquire:

"Have you seen a small man in black, with a prairie hat, ride by?"

"One of the cowboys scratched his head."

"A small man?"

"Yes, in black."

"A small man in black?"

"Yes, with a broad gray hat."

"With a broad gray hat? Say, Tom, did we

see a small man in black, with a broad gray hat, this mornin'?"

Tom grunted.

"Well, what of it?"

"What of it?" cried Jenks angrily. "There is this of it. The man's a horse-thief. Which way did he go?"

Tom looked up gravely and shook his head, remarking:

"You're wrong, stranger. We hain't seen no hoss thief this mornin'."

"Did you see the man I spoke of—a small man in black?"

"What kind of a hoss did he hev?" asked Tom's friend suddenly.

"A dapple gray, I believe. That was the one stolen," said Jenks hurriedly.

"Then we hain't seen him," said the cowboy, stolidly.

Jenks uttered an impatient curse.

"This fellow knows more than he lets on, gentlemen. Flog the truth out of him."

In a moment a score of long quirts flourished in the air, and the cowboys ran into their hut under a shower of blows, barred the door hastily, and began to fire out of the little window, under the impression that their foes were high-way robbers.

Foaming with rage, the ranchers' party stormed the hut, losing several men by wounds in the desperate resistance, and began to flog the two men unmercifully, till one broke down and yelled:

"I'll tell, I'll tell."

"Tell, then," roared Jenks, with a last cut, in pure spite.

"It's the Gentle Shepherd you mean, and he's gone on to rouse the boys," said the man falteringly. "He told us to cover his trail, for the ranchers was bound to wipe him out afore he got to him. He's got a bay hoss, gentlemen, and it ain't stolen nuther. I've seen him ride on the drive, when he was head of the Queen's Ranch. That's all, so help me, gents."

"Which road did he take?" asked Jenks.

"South Park, gents. He's goin' to Stocktown or Muleville, I don't know which."

"That'll do," said Jenks. "Mind, if you've lied to us, we'll come back and wipe you out. Come, gentlemen."

And they rode away, taking the direction to the railroad, for they knew that if the Gentle Shepherd was bound for the Stocktown station they could get there ahead of him by rail.

They did not know that, as soon as they were out of sight, the cowboy who had given them the information said to his friend Tom:

"Gawl darn their karkidges, I fooled 'em arter all. The Shepherd will hev time to git the boys together, and warm them."

"Them bosses thinks we're down; but they'll find out afore we've done," responded Tom, rubbing his shoulders. "Gawl darn 'em, I wish we'd hed any sorter show, but a hundred to one's too much for the best man ever stepped."

The ranchers rode to the next station, and sent on messengers to Stocktown to rouse the country side. It seemed as if the Gentle Shepherd had found his doom at last. The whole power of the Rancher's League, which he had defied at the election, was bent on his destruction, now they had found a pretext, however shallow; and they bent all their energies to declaring him an outlaw, if possible.

Strother, who had been shot through the lungs, was not expected to live; and he made a bitter ante-mortem statement, in which he accused the Shepherd of cheating at cards, snatching the stakes, shooting him down without warning, and escaping.

Another rancher swore that he had seen the Shepherd riding off on his horse, which had been stolen, and the district attorney was pressed to take immediate action to have the absent man indicted and tried, at railroad speed.

Twenty million dollars in property, and a hundred determined cattle-owners, in a scantly populated State, can do a good deal; and within three days after the flight of the hunted man, the *Drover* contained the following article:

"THE COURTS."

"GENERAL SESSIONS—PART I.—The grand jury of Denver yesterday brought in a true bill against James Arthur, member for Sangre Cristo county, for assault with intent to kill, and grand larceny.

"Mr. Grimshaw, district attorney, has expressed his determination to push the case to the uttermost at once, and there is little doubt that the accused will be taken, as constables are searching for him in all parts of the States.

"Mr. Strother, the victim of the assault, lies at the point of death, and is not expected to recover.

"The brief career of this audacious young rufian is a lesson to the people about which there can be no mistake. Last fall, owing to the arts of the demagogue, he knew so well how to employ, this man was chosen to represent his county in the Legislature, against a worthy and highly respected gentleman, who had a stake in the country. Within one short year this vaunted desperado, who rejoices in the ironical sobriquet of the Gentle Shepherd, is a fugitive from justice, with a price on his head of ten thousand dollars. The cowboys, whose foolish ardor placed him where he is, have a chance now to reflect on who are their best friends in the end—their employers who give them their living, or demagogues who trade on their votes.

"When this ruffian is caught, as caught he must be very soon, we predict for him a short trial and a long rope."

The *Patriot* had an article in a more guarded strain, in which the necessity of deliberate procedure and a fair trial was mentioned; but there was no disguising the fact that the public sentiment of all the "respectable" men in Colorado was dead against the Shepherd.

Friends he had none who dared to speak out, except Steve Rankin, who did not go near the club any more, but spoke freely in bar-rooms and elsewhere in favor of the Shepherd, as:

"The best little man I ever saw in my life. I swear, when I saw him in that corner, I thought he was going to crawl; and to see the way in which he fooled them all was just too sweet for anything. Boys, he had a derringer in each sleeve. What d'ye think of that? I watched him, and his hands never went near his pockets, but he fired two shots for all that as he went out of the window. Wait till the trial comes off. Maybe some one will be fooled again."

The only person among the ranchers who expressed any sorrow and sympathy for the Shepherd, and could do so with safety, was Pacheco.

Known as he was to have lost an arm by the Shepherd's shot, his tone was taken as an evidence of unexampled generosity, and only tended to aggravate the feeling against the absent man.

And in the midst of all his affected talk in favor of the Shepherd, Pacheco paid daily visits to the office of Boanerges Brown, counselor at law, and had long private talks with that individual, from which he emerged smiling and placid.

As for the judge, he seemed to be much cast down at the turn affairs had taken, though no one knew why outside of his own office.

He was playing a double part, as he had been doing all along, secretly in favor of the Shepherd, but pretending to be in league with Pacheco.

He and Arthur had been engaged in a business about which there existed a great deal of mystery, but in which they had managed to make considerable sums of money.

What that business was, will appear in good time, but meanwhile the judge was much cast down from the fact that the Shepherd had had in his pocket at the time of his flight all the capital of the concern, and the judge, thinking over what he would have done in a similar position, came to the conclusion that he would never see either Shepherd or money again.

Wherefore he stayed much in his office, brooding over his vanished capital, and went twice a day to the post-office to look for letters, waxing more and more despondent every day.

Thus matters went on for three weeks from the date of the club trial, when the *Daily Stock List* contained the following short paragraph:

"A report comes to us that the notorious Gentle Shepherd has made overtures of surrender to the district attorney, but that gentleman refuses to be interviewed on the subject. To-morrow we hope to be able to give fuller information."

The judge read the paragraph and his face brightened up perceptibly.

"I thought he wouldn't desert his partner in a hole," he said to himself. "I believe I'll pay a visit to that same district attorney myself. I'm Arthur's counsel anyway."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A HOT SCENT.

THE time for the great drive had come, and the ranchers had to repair to their possessions, leaving the seductive delights of Denver behind them, to attend to their business, for it is on the annual sales of their spare stock that they depend for a living, and a pretty good one too.

Mr. Pacheco had gone down to the Ten League, Mr. Carroll was at Fork Ford, Jenks at his own place, known as the Elk Horn Ranch, at the edge of Sangre Cristo county, and Miss Wallace was besieged with rancher visitors, who came partly to see the heiress, partly to find out, if they could, something about the Gentle Shepherd, who had so suddenly vanished from sight and memory.

But they found no sign of the Shepherd at the Queen's Ranch, and whereas they had expected to find Miss Wallace despondent and moping for the loss of her lover, that lady was more cheerful than usual.

The news of her engagement had spread so far that a few of the ranchers even ventured to mention Arthur's name and ask maliciously if she had heard from him lately, to all of whom she replied that she had "perfect confidence in Mr. Arthur, and was satisfied that he was safe."

And this was all they could get out of her on the subject, while her demeanor was so cheerful, not to say, overflowing with life and spirits, that it soon began to be whispered about that she had the Shepherd hidden somewhere on the ranch, and had married him in secret.

This idea caused the flow of visitors to increase daily, and the Queen's Ranch was constantly being invaded by parties of curious neighbors, who came to talk to the cowboys and spy out the land.

But it soon became apparent to all that, if the

Shepherd were on the ranch, the cowboys did not know it.

They were all ready enough to talk about him, and expressed great indignation at the way he was being treated, and joy at the way he had escaped his foes in Denver, but not one would admit having seen him.

To Tom Johnson, who was sent over by Pacheco at one time to spy out the land, and who came to his old friend Jack Townley (better known as "Limpy Jack," from a halt in his gait, produced by a bullet wound in the hip), Limpy said:

"He ain't hyar, an' I'm givin' it straight. If he was hyar, the boys wouldn't be held, and you know it, Tom. If it's gwine to be rancher ag'in' cowboy, we'll go in to clean out the ranchers, as we did last year. The Shepherd ain't goin' to be railroaded without a trial. But he ain't hyar, and ain't be'n hyar, or we'd ha' known it. When he gits good and ready, he'll come, and them as is talkin' so loud mebbe will take a back seat, as they did afore."

Tom Johnson scowled at him.

"Who took a back seat fur him?"

"You did fur one," answered Limpy, boldly, "and you know it. We hain't seen you fur months, till now you think the Shepherd's outer the way, and you're comin' round again."

Tom scowled at him contemptuously.

"You think you're pretty smart, Limpy, but you ain't so smart as you think. I ain't no man's fool, to go fur the Gentle Shepherd in the middle of his gang; but the man don't live that kin make me take water single-handed, and you know that, Limpy Jack."

"I know the Shepherd did, fur we all seen ye run when he was arter ye, in the open field."

"He had his weepins, and mine was all empty, Limpy. He had the drop on me, and I passed; that was all."

"Mebbe he had the drop on ye when ye wanted to wipe the platform with him?" retorted Limpy. "He was *thar*, and you didn't come to time. You call yourself King of the Cowboys, and you didn't hev spunk to fight fur the name. Jest you go home, Tom Johnson. You ain't no good on this ranch."

Tom Johnson looked round and saw that they were alone, the nearest cowboy on the ranch being half a mile off, with his back turned, so he said in his most insulting way:

"Mebbe you'd like to take up the quar'l fur your do-lrotted Gentle Shepherd, Limpy? Trot out your weepins, if you're set on it."

Limpy laid his hand on his pistol, but then withdrew it.

"I don't want no difficulty with you, Tom," he said quietly. "You kin shoot me down ef you're a mind to, but mark my words, if ye do. I b'long to the league, and the league will jest hunt you down fur it."

"The League! What League?" asked Tom in a tone of scorn. "Is it your old Cowboy's League? Why that's broke up, long ago."

"Is it?" retorted Limpy. "You'll find out whether it is or not, if you fire on me, Tom Johnson. I'm gwine to attend to my critters."

He was riding away when Tom called after him:

"The League's one thing: the Shepherd's another. I'm a-goin' to wipe him out, the next time I see him, and then you look out, Mr. Limpy."

Limpy turned round in his saddle.

"You can't wipe out oneside of the Shepherd, and don't you surgit it."

"I whipped him till he begged two year ago," cried Tom as a last parting shot, "and if he wants to git another dose he's got to come to me. I'm King of the Cowboys yet."

Limpy made no answer, but rode off again, and Tom returned home to report to Pacheco that the Shepherd could not be on the ranch, or the cowboys would have known it.

Pacheco looked uneasy at the report, and cross-questioned Tom till he got from him the particulars of his fight of words with Limpy.

Then he rode off to his friend Jenks and found that gentleman just on the point of mounting his horse.

"Come in, Luis," he said hastily. "I've got news for you."

He took him into his long low house of adobes or sun-dried brick, and shut the door before he said in a low voice:

"Arthur's found!"

"Found! Where?"

Pacheco looked decidedly uneasy.

Jenks handed him a copy of the *Patriot*, just out, and pointed to a paragraph.

"MARRIED, on the 17th inst., at the residence of Justice Verplank, in Blue Lick county, the Hon. James Arthur, member for Sangre Cristo, to Miss Kate Wallace of the Queen's Ranch, by the Reverend James Arthur, father of the bridegroom. The happy pair started for Queen's Ranch immediately after the ceremony to pass the honeymoon."

Pacheco stared in amazement.

"Married, and openly advertising the fact? But that is not finding him. This may be a blind."

Jenks shook his head.

"It's true. The man is somewhere on the ranch in some disguise. I've been to the *Patriot* office, and find that the advertisement was put

in, and paid for by one of the Queen's men, Pedro the Vaquero."

"Did they stop him?"

"No. But that would have been no use. They couldn't have got anything out of him now. The Reverend James Arthur is his father, and no one seems to have ever seen him. I've been laying pipes to catch him yet he has come here and performed the ceremony. I propose taking a party, going to the ranch and searching it. Will you go along?"

Pacheco hesitated.

"N-no. I don't want to—the fact is, I've made a discovery lately, that makes me shy of going there."

"And what is that?"

"This Arthur is not quite so poor and insignificant a man as he seems. He has rich friends at the East, and they are related to the Wallaces."

"Related? How did you find that out?"

"Through a man in Denver. Arthur is a second cousin of his present wife, if he really has married Kate Wallace, which I doubt."

"Doubt? Why?"

"Because it is certain that he is not on the ranch or the cowboys would know it. A little fellow like him would be remarked anywhere."

"But he might be hidden in the house."

"I don't believe it. Plenty of our friends have been there and found the house full, but no trace of the Shepherd. There's quite a large party of eastern visitors, all ladies, and one old gentleman with a gray beard, who seems to be a minister—"

"Then that's the father," interrupted Jenks eagerly. "Put things together, and it must be."

"Possibly, though they call him something else. But what can we do?"

"Take a crowd there, surround the house and bring him out. I've got the sheriff to appoint me a deputy, and I'll take a *posse comitatus* that they can't fight. It must be done quietly, before the cowboys get wind of it, for we cannot depend on them on account of the cursed league—"

"Whom can you depend on?"

"Ourselves and Denver militia. I've got the Governor to promise us all the force necessary, and they'll be down by the train to-night. The Gentle Shepherd is smart, but not smart enough for us, when we are in earnest."

So Jenks passed the rest of that day in preparations, and when night came he and Pacheco—the latter very nervous—rode to the nearest railroad station, and found there the whole force of the Rancher's Club from all parts of the State, a hundred shrewd, desperate men, armed to the teeth with the latest patterns of repeating firearms and accompanied by two companies of the State troops, who were renowned for the excellence of their target practice.

The whole force disembarked from the train, carrying saddles and bridles with them, and the neighboring ranches furnished all the horses required in a very short time, with such cowboys as the owners thought they could trust, till it was with a force of three hundred and fifty men, the sheriff of the county of Sangre Cristo and a number of the Governor's staff, the ranchers started on their night journey to surprise Kate Wallace and her guests, among whom they felt sure of finding the Gentle Shepherd.

They rode all night and arrived on the ranch in the morning, surrounding the house in perfect silence before daylight.

The few cowboys who were found on night duty round the herds were scooped in silently, and the surprise was complete, when the barking of the dogs round the main buildings announced that the place was surrounded.

Then the sheriff gave the order:

"Shoot down the dogs if they try to attack you. Go in and disarm all the cowboys first."

The militia-men were drawn up and the order was executed without any sort of resistance as soon as the astonished cowboys saw the uniforms outside.

In twenty minutes the triumphant Jenks counted a hundred and twenty unarmed prisoners, made without any noise or confusion, and these were put under a guard in a small corral while the sheriff and his posse surrounded the house and knocked at the door, just as the day dawned.

There was no trouble in getting into that house, for the doors were not even locked, and very soon the ranchers were in complete possession of everything, and shouting up-stairs to the inmates to "come down and dress."

For even Jenks did not care to go up, when it was a notorious fact that the house was full of ladies and gentlemen from the East, of whom more than one was suspected of belonging to some newspaper.

Very soon heads appeared over the stair-rails in all sorts of disarray, some of them with beards on, others with the unmistakable feminine night-cap. They all looked frightened at the sight of armed men below, with pistols in their hands, and one gentleman inquired, tremulously:

"What's the matter, for Heaven's sake?"

"The matter is that I'm Sheriff Horton, of Sangre Cristo, and I've got to search this house,"

called out the sheriff. "I don't want to be rude to nobody, but it's time you was all up and dressed. If it ain't done in five minutes, me and my men's coming up. Hyar's my warrant."

And the sheriff waved a paper which brought forth the answer:

"Certainly, certainly, by all means."

And before the five minutes were gone the guests were all assembled on the landing, the ladies pale and trembling, the men excited and nervous, for they were all from the East and not used to Colorado ways yet. Then the sheriff went up with Jenks, Tom Johnson, and a score of men, who went through every room in the house and searched high and low for the missing Shepherd, finding no one who resembled him in the remotest degree, till they were confronted by the mistress of the ranch, who came toward the sheriff, dressed completely and accompanied by a whole bevy of young ladies, crowding to her as if for protection. Then she said, coldly:

"Well, gentlemen, you have searched long enough. Now please tell me what it is you want?"

The sheriff took off his hat with an air of embarrassment.

"We are informed that Jim Arthur, called the Gentle Shepherd, is hidin' in this hyar ranch, Miss Wallace; and we're bound to have him, if we have to stay hyar all day and search the chimneys. So if you want to git rid of us, jest trot him out."

"Do you wish to hurt Mr. Arthur?" she asked, looking searchingly at him.

"No, marm, we don't; but we've got to hev him. Them as knows me, knows I never lost a prisoner yet; but he's got to stand his trial, marm."

Kate Wallace looked round at the faces of the ranchers, and read on them all an expression of eager watchfulness that caused her to answer:

"And suppose I give him up, who is to guarantee him against being shot down instantly by his enemies, who wait for him with arms in their hands?"

The sheriff eagerly answered:

"I'll guarantee him myself, marm. I'll go bail no one teches him but me, and ef harm comes to him, him and me goes under together."

"What makes you think he's here?" she pursued, glancing round her again.

Here Jenks could not contain himself.

"Because your wedding's in the paper. That's why! If he's married money, he'll have a chance to spend it for counsel."

Sue looked at him with a slight curl of the lip and answered, quietly:

"If I had not expected to protect my own husband, I should not have advertised our marriage. As it is, I shall not give him up. Find him if you can. Come, girls, I suppose these gentlemen will not wish to disturb us at breakfast. They can stay as long as they please, and search all they like. I wish them joy of it."

So saying, she and a little procession of girls passed through the midst of the *posse comitatus*, and went down to the dining-room, where they found the ordinary routine of the house going on as if nothing had happened, the inmates, servants and all, passing to and fro among drawn pistols as if no one were present, ignoring the existence of aught but themselves.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SHEPHERD APPEARS.

For the first time in his life the Sheriff of Sangre Cristo was nonplussed.

Armed resistance he had expected, but this passive resistance, combined with the presence of ladies, was more than he could meet intelligently.

The guests of Miss Wallace went about the house, ate their breakfasts, chatted and behaved otherwise as if there were no one near them, while the men of the posse stood round the walls, their mouths watering for something to eat, and no one attended to them.

But the sheriff was a keen hand, and he felt certain that this singular behavior was connected in some way with the man for whom he was searching.

But where was the Shepherd?

He looked at every guest attentively, and then went over the servants, but could see no one who resembled the missing outlaw in any manner.

Jenks was still more curious and prying, staring even at the ladies, in such a fashion that one of them said something to her neighbor, and a titter passed round, which made even Jenks feel ashamed of himself, when all the young ladies stared at him together, and four or five put up eye-glasses as if to inspect him better.

"It is a specimen of the genus snob, species *Coloradensis*, young ladies," said a severe looking old lady in spectacles, with a false front and a cap. "Very interesting, as you see. The peculiarity of this interesting animal is that it never knows when it is ridiculous, and can only be tamed by constant applications of cowhide in the hands of male friends. Mr. Macdonald!"

The severe lady raised her voice and Angus Macdonald, who was sitting at another table with Nelly Craig, both talking in whispers, instantly started up, saying:

"Very much at your service, Mrs. Arthur. What do you require, madam?"

Jenks started, too, at the name.

"Mrs. Arthur!" he ejaculated.

The severe lady did not notice him, but went on to Macdonald:

"There is a young man here, one of the sheriff's officers, I presume, who is staring at us in a very offensive way. Will you be good enough to ask his master to step here?"

"Certainly," said Angus, and then he called: "Holloa, sheriff. Here's a lady wants you. Mrs. Arthur, the Shepherd's mother, if you want to know who it is."

The sheriff looked half angry, half ashamed of the peremptory way in which he was addressed, and answered:

"I ain't here on nobody's beck and call. What does the lady want?"

"That you should remove an impudent ruffian of the name of Jenks, who is trying to insult these ladies," said Angus sharply. "Come, you've a right to look for your man, but you don't want to be connected with rudeness to ladies."

The sheriff instantly came forward and said to Jenks:

"Here, you get out of here. I know my biz without any of your spyan'. You ranchers don't know nothen. Git it!"

And Jenks in a fume shoved his pistol back into his belt, and said:

"All right. If you know so much, find the Shepherd."

And so slouched away outside, as Mrs. Arthur observed audibly:

"My dear Kate, is that the way all your rich Colorado gentlemen behave? Why, we should call such people the lowest of the low in Boston. Positively James will have to take you there to live. This is a very strange country. I wonder you can endure it."

"I'm sure, mamma, you can't be more astonished than I am," said Kate, apologetically. "I've known Mr. Horton since I was a child, and never knew him to be rude to a lady before; but they are so set on taking poor Jim, that I suppose it has made them all forget themselves."

"And what has James done?" asked the old lady, staring at the sheriff through her spectacles.

Here the sheriff, who had a dim idea that some one was making game of him, said:

"Ef you want to know, marm, I kin tell ye mighty quick. Be you the Shepherd's mother, marm?"

"The Shepherd? Dear me, man, whom do you mean?" asked the old lady.

"I mean Jim Arthur, the Gentle Shepherd, marm. That's who I mean. He's wanted for shootin' a man and stealin' a hoss; that's what he's wanted fur."

"Dear me, is that all?" asked Mrs. Arthur, quietly. "I thought he had been robbing a church or doing something bad. Didn't you ever shoot a man, sheriff?"

"Me, marm, me? You bet!" grunted the sheriff, surprised into the admission. "That is, all in the way of law, you know, all in the way of law."

"And you are looking for him for that," the old lady observed calmly. "Did you ever play hunt the slipper, Mr. Horton?"

The sheriff turned as red as a beet, as the girls all broke out into a titter, and he angrily retorted:

"No, nor I don't intend to nuther. I'm gwine to stay here till I find him, I am."

"Then the best thing we can do is to go to Denver, Kate," said the old lady, rising. "I am sure when the gentlemen hear that James has gone back to Boston they will not insist on staying to annoy us as they are doing."

So saying, she put her arm round Kate's waist, and the ladies swept from the room, followed by the gentlemen, while the sheriff's posse made another search of the house, after which Horton came out on the piazza, and said:

"Miss Wallace—"

"Mrs. Arthur, if you please," said Kate.

"Waal, Miss Arthur then. Ef you'll give me your word as a lady that the Shepherd ain't nowheres round this ranch, I'll take my men off."

Kate looked at the old lady, who was sitting by her knitting, and the latter looked up sweetly, saying:

"Didn't you hear he had gone to Boston?"

"Boston be durned, marm. He ain't, and you know it too, as well as I do."

"Then why ask us?" she replied, in the same mocking way.

"I didn't ax you, marm. I axed Miss Arthur, Kate Wallace as was. She won't tell a lie for no man, she won't. Is the Gentle Shepherd hyar, miss, or not?"

Kate colored slightly.

"I've told you to find him if you can. I shall say no more."

"Very well," said the sheriff slowly, "then I arrest you two fur harbordin' and concealin' a fugitive from just ce. If I can't git one, I'll git the others. You're my pris'ners."

Kate turned pale, but the old lady said in a tone of great indignation:

"Hoity-toity! and did you bring down three hundred men here to arrest two women? In the town of Boston, sir, they sell such men as you contemptible cowards!"

"You kin call me what you please, marm," retorted the sheriff, grimly; "but ef you give me much more slack I'll hev to clap the irons on yer. I'm gwine to take you so the Shepherd'll come arter you, that's all. Give us the Shepherd, and we don't want you."

The old lady turned to the sheriff.

"See here: suppose I tell you where the Shepherd is, will you order off your men and trust him to go with you to Denver?"

"No, marm. I ain't no fool. I know well enough he'd get off on the road. You'll come fur him, both of yer, and that settles it."

So saying he retired, and soon came back with horses, when he brought up his band to the front of the house, and said:

"Now then, will you get on horses, or has we got to tie you on, ladies?"

The old lady deliberately folded up her knitting-work, and rose from the low rocker in which she had been sitting on the piazza.

"I'm ready to go with you," she said quietly, "but this lady shall not go. She is on her own land, and if you try to use any violence there will be trouble here."

The sheriff looked at her amazedly.

"Trouble! Wh'll make it, you?"

"Yes, I'll" came the answer.

"And who the blazes be you?" he asked, half contemptuously.

The old lady stepped toward the door of the house, and looked over the cavalcade in front, with a cool scrutiny that took in everything, answering:

"I am the Gentle Shepherd!"

At the same instant, the disguised youth darted back into the house and vanished, followed by a babel of curses and shouts, in the midst of which came the sound of firing behind the buildings, then a yell of fury and revenge, and away went the whole crowd full speed over the plain in pursuit of a small man on a sorrel thoroughbred mare, who skimmed the ground as if she had wings, and in whose rider they recognized in a moment the figure of the Shepherd.

All thought of the ranch gone from their minds, away went the mob of pursuers as hard as they could tear, the sorrel filly leading them a rapid chase, so that the followers were soon strung out in a line more than a mile long.

Away went the sorrel filly, and now the time had come when the broncos were thrown out of the race, and the leaders were reduced to the rich ranchers who rode a better and larger class of horses.

On went the filly, till the line of the Queen's Ranch was crossed and she began to flag, while Jenks and a score of his friends began to gain on her, a mile in advance of the rest.

Then the Gentle Shepherd suddenly pulled up, threw up his right hand and called out to his nearest pursuer:

"Don't fire! I surrender to the law."

"Aha!" roared Jenks; "come on, boys. He begs at last! Kill the son of a sea cook!"

And in a moment every rancher who was near enough began to fire.

The Gentle Shepherd immediately leaped off his mare, letting her run loose, and shouted again:

"Don't fire! I surrender!"

"No use!" shouted Jenks. "We've got you!"

And with that he fired full at the other, not fifty feet away, and saw the Shepherd stagger and drop.

"Got him at last!" yelled the rancher, wild with joy; and up galloped a score of men to gloat over a dead body, when, to their intense amazement, the Shepherd leaped up, as well as ever, a revolver in each hand, shot Jenks down in a moment, dropped a man with every shot out of twelve in as many seconds, not stirring from his tracks, and laughed aloud as he saw the remaining men, completely cowed by the fearful execution, turn their horses and gallop away in mortal terror.

Then he whistled to his filly, jumped on her back and rode off, coolly reloading his revolvers as he went, leaving twelve corpses behind him as a memento of his skill and a terror to the pursuers who might feel inclined to come any further.

And he was right, as the event proved, for he had shot down the leaders of the men who wished to kill him any way, trial or no trial, and had not been without the presence of witnesses that would stand him in good stead in the day of trial.

For as he rode away from the scene of the slaughter, there was Bill Travers, sitting on his horse, with several Fork Ford cowboys near him, and Bill ejaculated:

"Hooroar fur the Shepherd! Ye jest cleaned 'em out bully, and they hain't got no hold on ye in the law. I heerd ye surrender, and the kep' on firin'. We'll back ye up now with all the cowboys in Colorado."

"It won't do," said Arthur, biting his lip and looking anxiously back. "One man cannot fight the State. Go to the sheriff, Bill, and ask him which he wants, a fight or a prisoner. Tell

him I'll go to Denver with him if he'll come to me alone, not otherwise. I can flee the State if I wish, but I prefer to clear my name. I've murdered no one, and I am ready to stand my trial, if I can have a fair one. Meet me if he consents at—"

He whispered something into Bill's ear and rode off toward "Old Baldy" at a rapid canter that showed the mare's flagging to have been merely a ruse, for she was as fresh as ever.

Bill Travers waved his long cow-horn, and the cowboys of the Fork Ford ranch began to gather together as the pursuers came cautiously up, imagining that a fresh contest was imminent.

But Bill Travers soon cooled them down with the remark:

"Now, gents, if you're lookin' fur a muss, you kin get one at Fork Ford and Macdonald's, ay, and Ten League Ranch, too, now it's daylight, 'cause there ain't a cowboy in these parts but what b'longs to the League. But we don't want to break no laws. Whar's the sheriff?"

The sheriff came up, looking haggard and anxious, to whom Bill communicated his message and received the answer:

"Will be give his word?"

"He will."

"Then I'll take it."

An hour later the whole posse, soldiers and all, were wending their way back to the railroad station, disgusted and ashamed of the way in which one man had beaten so many, disheartened at the loss of their leaders, of whom not one remained; and the Sheriff of Sangre Cristo county, with Bill Travers by his side, rode away to the Queen's Ranch, which he found going on as usual since the departure of the raiders, and where he met Kate Wallace on the steps, who asked him, with a smile of sarcastic meaning:

"Well, did you find Mrs. Arthur?"

The sheriff could not resist a blush, and hung his head sheepishly, saying:

"That's enough, Miss Kate. I've know'd ye since ye was knee-high to a preerie dog. Don't go to pokin' fun at me. Yer old man is a-comin' in to surrender, and I reckin he'll hev a fair trial now. I'll take his word to go to Denver with me, 'cause I know he's a good man."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COLORADO NOTIONS.

AND a fair trial the Gentle Shepherd had after all, spite of the ranchers, and for a very simple reason.

The ranchers, with all their wealth, were only a hundred or so of men, while the Cowboys' League, formed at the previous election, contained nearly twenty thousand voters, and exercised a great silent force on public opinion.

When the trial came on, it was Arthur who seemed to be in the light of the prosecuting officer, for he it was that produced witnesses that no one had ever supposed to exist, showing that he had only acted in strict self defense at the celebrated club fracas, and that he had fought one against thirty.

Steve Rankin came out in court and exposed the whole scene, while Judge Boanerges Brown acted as counsel for the defense, and electrified the court and spectators by his glowing appeal to a jury of cowboys.

His closing remarks, after reviewing the testimony, were reported in the *Patriot* as "unusually felicitous," though the *Drover* dismissed them without any comment at all; but the result was that the jury acquitted the Gentle Shepherd without leaving the box, on every count of an indictment which occupied twenty pages of legal cap, and covered the deaths of twelve men, the shooting of Strother—who was said to be recovering—and the supposed case of horse stealing, which was justly looked on as worst of all, had the Shepherd really done it.

And then, the air ringing with cheers for the Gentle Shepherd, he left the court, with a lady leaning on his arm, whom everybody knew to be the heiress of the Queen's Ranch.

"And now, Kate," said he, "you've got the best of me after all; for I've married you, and Pacheco has not been driven from the State yet."

"Never mind Pacheco, Jim," she said softly. "I've got you, and he can't do any more harm to us."

"Nevertheless," he answered, "I must keep my word. The man must leave the State. He killed your father, and I am not only your husband, but your kinsman, as you are aware. The honor of our family is concerned in sending the man away."

"But no more bloodshed, Jim," she urged. "There was a time when nothing seemed to me too bad for him, when he was triumphant, but now he is fallen, I don't like to trample even on him."

"Well, well," he said evasively, "we'll see about it. I have a call to make on Judge Brown this morning. You wouldn't let me pay back those election expenses, you know; but I have to settle some private business with him and then I'm ready to play overseer for you again, dearest."

"Ab, Jim, will you ever forgive me for the way I used to treat you, before I knew what a man you are?"

"I've done that long ago, ever since I found out what a woman you are, Mrs. Arthur."

Then he took her into the hotel, and met there the same gray-bearded old gentleman with the white neck-tie of whom Pacheco had told Jenks as being the probable father of the Gentle Shepherd.

This old gentleman greeted them both warmly and said to Arthur:

"I need not ask how the trial has gone or you would not be here; but now that it is all over I want you to make me a promise, James."

The young man's face grew cold and reserved instantly. He knew that his father, a clergyman from the East, looked with horror on his son's course, though he could not help admiring his courage and skill.

The elder Arthur had not even dared to go near the court room to hear the evidence, having the doctrine of non-resistance of injuries too firmly implanted in his breast to believe that any excuse of self-defense could justify a man in killing so many of his fellow-creatures as the Gentle Shepherd had notoriously done.

"What is it, father?" asked the young man, knowing what was coming.

"I want you to promise me, James, to do something to day."

"What is it, father?" again asked the younger man.

"It is to leave your pistols behind you today; that's all, Jim. I know the look of your face, since you were a boy, and I see something in it I am sorry to see."

"And what is that?" asked James.

"Death," said the old man in a solemn tone. "You are going to kill some one else, James, elated with your own escape from a felon's doom, with the love of a wife who would die for you to sustain you in good, yet you are going to do a bad action. I see it in your face."

For the first time since Kate had known the man she had so lately married when he was a hunted fugitive, she saw him falter and look confused.

"I don't know what you mean, sir," he said evasively.

"You do, Jim. You are going to clear off some old score with some man who has become your enemy, I know not whom."

"Then you should not condemn me so swiftly, sir. You do not know what is my cause for punishing this man."

"I know that no cause will excuse the taking a life, save the danger to one's own," said old Arthur firmly. "You have changed greatly since you came to Colorado, James."

The young man burst into a bitter laugh as he ejaculated:

"Changed! My God, yes. Do you know what has changed me, father?"

"What, my son?"

"Coming here and finding that all my previous life went for nothing here. You toiled and pinched yourself in the East to send me to college. What was the result?"

"That you gained a brilliant record and became a first-class scholar."

"Yes, at the price of what?"

"I do not know, my son?"

"Well, I'll tell you. At the price of my manhood, I graduated, a puny weakling, ready to drop into my grave with consumption. I came here to regain my health, and what good did my education do me? I had either to starve or keep sheep. I was kicked and cuffed about by men whom I envied for their physical strength, and I found that if I wanted to become a man, I must cultivate my body and devote all my time and energy to becoming a strong and skillful one."

"And now you are one," interrupted his father, "why not let well enough alone and enjoy life as it is given to you in full measure?"

"Because," said James in a low bitter tone, "I bear on my body to-day scars that are not yet atoned for. Look here."

As he spoke he threw off his coat, vest and shirt, and showed to his father and wife the cruel scars that still remained, to attest the punishment he had received from Tom Johnson, two years before.

"Look, father, look, Kate," he said. "I never showed those to living man since I received them; but I tell you that till I have punished the man who made them, I cannot enjoy life. They burn into my flesh yet, amid all the plaudits that the fighters of Colorado heap on the Gentle Shepherd, to remind that there is one man, yet alive, who boasts in his cups that he whipped me like a dog, two years ago."

There was a great difference in the way in which the two people in that room looked at the little man as he stood there.

The old man, who was gentle of nature and large in frame, looked at the scars pitifully, and said:

"But that is all over, my boy. Remember St. Paul was beaten many a time with rods, and gloried in it. You are a good Christian, I hope, though—"

"Oh, bush!" burst in Kate, with nshy face and glittering eyes. "You're not fit for Colorado. Mr. Arthur. St. Paul, indeed! Who beat St. Paul?"

"The Roman officers, my dear," he answered, timidly, not knowing how to talk to his fiery little daughter-in-law.

"Then he didn't have the spirit of a man if he gloried in it," she retorted, sharply. "Put on your clothes, Jim, and tell me who did that?"

"Tom Johnson, King of the Cowboys," he answered, quietly. "I understand he's been in Denver at this trial."

Old Arthur broke out tremulously:

"I knew there was something, from your face, James. You're going after this man, at last, and it will end in blood. You're going to kill him for beating you."

"Of course he is," interrupted Kate, with her black eyes blazing. "Do you think I'd own him for a husband if he didn't? Do you think I want to hear people say, when that man passes: 'There goes the man that whipped Kate Wallace's husband'? It must be done, father, so don't waste your breath. I tell you, you don't understand Colorado."

"Indeed I don't," said the old gentleman, sorrowfully. "Such bloody minded people I never saw. There isn't a mite of Christianity in the whole State, and to think of MY son being a noted desperado who has killed more men than he can count! It's terrible! I think I'd better go back to the East."

The Gentle Shepherd, who had resumed his clothes, laughed:

"Not yet, father. Wait a few days, and we'll be ready to go back with you. I was going to fix Pacheco, but he has saved me the trouble."

"How?" ejaculated Kate. "You told me that he—"

"Yes, I know. I didn't want to let you into the secret, but I must now. I'm going to Brown's office, to conclude the purchase of the Ten League Ranch. He has offered to sell it to me cheap, and I've bought it."

"Bought it?" echoed Kate, "why, how—?"

"Did I get the money? At the Rancher's Club, my dear, and it came near costing me my life, as you know. Four Jacks did it, Kitty."

This last in a whisper to her, the old gentleman, absorbed in sorrow over the wickedness of Colorado, not noticing what was going on.

"I'm going to Brown's," James continued aloud, "and the deeds will be recorded in my wife's name, as a wedding present to her. As for Tom Johnson—"

Here he went over to his father and took him by the hand.

"Make your mind easy. I will not kill the man. I will not even put a hole through him, father. Will not that satisfy you?"

"But what, then, are you going to do?" asked the old man, wistfully.

James Arthur paused at the door just as he was going out.

"Ask my wife what I am going to do with him, when I say I will not kill him? She's Colorado born, and knows the rule."

"What is he going to do, my dear?" asked the old gentleman, still more tremulously.

Kate looked at her husband with all the pride of a young lioness in her mate.

"I think I know what he is going to do," she answered, slowly. "First he's going to find Tom Johnson."

"Well, and then?"

"And then he's going to get the drop on him."

"The what—the drop—I don't quite—"

"Get the drop on him, of course. Make him hold up his hands and take his pistols from him, I mean."

"Oh, yes," said the old man, bewildered, "but suppose he won't give them up?"

"He will," said Kate, quietly. "You don't know Jim yet. You haven't seen him in a fight."

"I begin to think I don't, my dear. I thought I did when he was a boy, but he has changed greatly since he came to this dreadful State of Colorado."

The Shepherd laughed good-humoredly.

"Don't abuse Colorado, father. You're only a tenderfoot yet. You'll like it better when you've been to a few round-ups, and seen a few cowboys on a tear."

"Cowboys on a tear!" ejaculated the old gentleman. "You do use such singular expressions here, James. Even your wife seems to understand them, and I don't."

Kate laughed too now, and put her little hand on her father-in-law's shoulder.

"It's only Colorado talk, sir. We'll try to talk English to you."

"Then tell me in plain English what James is going to do to this Tom—what is his name?"

"Tom Johnson. Well, sir, he is going to whip him or get whipped himself, that's certain. Something has happened that makes it necessary. I see that in Jim's face, but I don't know what it is."

"What is it, James?" asked his father.

"Simply that Tom Johnson was in town yesterday before the trial was over, and publicly boasted that he had whipped me till I begged, and could do it again. That's all, father. I admit that he whipped me when I came here, a tenderfoot, on the brink of consumption, but

even then I did not beg. Tom Johnson has got to take that back. That's all."

"How long will you be gone, Jim?" his wife asked, as he opened the door, while the old gentleman did not know what to say.

"I don't know, Kate, except this: you won't see me back till I've whipped Tom Johnson. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she said, quietly. "I shall not wait here, Jim, for you won't find that man to-day, or I am much mistaken. Meet me at home. I'll wait for you there."

He kissed his hand and vanished, while his father ejaculated:

"Well, I declare. He's gone off without ever kissing his wife and he may never see her again. Colorado ways and notions are to me the strangest things—"

"Do you know why he didn't kiss me?" asked Kate.

"No, my dear, I confess I don't."

"Because he knew I should have told him, no—not till you've whipped Tom Johnson."

"And why not, my dear?"

"Because, till he has done that, he is only the second best man in Colorado and my husband must be the best man in the State."

"The best man! But do you mean to say that you will call him a better man, if he comes back after having engaged in a brutal contest with this ruffian Tom Johnson?"

"I shall call him a better man than Tom Johnson, and he calls himself the King of the Cowboys. When Jim whips him, Jim will be king and he'll have the Queen of the Ranchers for a wife. I never thought I'd be proud of the title they gave me, but I shall be when Jim is the king."

The old gentleman sighed and shook his head in a puzzled way.

"Colorado notions are very strange indeed, my dear Katherine. I don't think I shall ever get used to them I think I'd better go back to Boston."

"Wait till Jim comes back," was all the answer Kate gave him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SETTLING UP.

WHEN the Gentle Shepherd left the room where his father and wife were, he went rapidly through the streets of Denver to Brown's office where he met the "jedge" fatter and more smiling than usual, closeted with Pacheco, a number of papers spread out before them.

The little man stepped in briskly, saluted Pacheco and observed:

"Now that everything else is settled, it comes to our turn, sir. You were into that plot against me—"

"No, so help me heaven!" cried Pacheco earnestly. "Don't force a quarrel on a cripple, Arthur. I'm not competent to face you and you know it."

"You forced a quarrel on my wife's father four years ago and killed him by foul play," returned Arthur sternly. "No, don't put your hand near your breast or down you go. I have the proof of it here from Brown. You thought him your friend when he's been my partner all this time. You wore armor when you fought Colonel Wallace, and you know that if I expose the fact, you'll be hunted out of Colorado as a coward."

Pacheco turned deadly pale.

"How do you know it?" he asked.

"Because I bought the suit myself and wore it when your friends chased me for my life. You hid it away after the duel, for fear it might be found out, but it was stolen from you and it lies in Brown's drawer now, with your name on the inside plate."

"Then you have worn it, too," said the rancher, sullenly, "and you have no right to cast stones at me."

"I never wore it in a duel. I wore it when the odds were against me, but in a duel every man should be equal. In four words, Pacheco, you must leave Colorado."

"I'll do it," said the rancher, sullenly, "if I sell my place, not without."

"That's a bargain. I've agreed to buy the ranch for three hundred thousand dollars. Sign the deed, and here's your money."

He pulled out a roll of bills, and Pacheco said eagerly:

"Of course I will, and glad to do it. God knows I don't want to stay here."

"And you will also," pursued the Shepherd, steadily, "sign this confession of wearing the armor?"

"But you'll use it against me."

"Not unless you come back to the State. As long as you stay away it remains a matter of honor between us three."

"Give me the paper," said Pacheco.

He signed it and the deed, received the money won from Strother, and left the office, saying:

"You'll never see me here again, but oh, if I only had my arm back, you couldn't have done this."

"That's just why I ruined it," said the Shepherd, coolly. "Good-bye, Pacheco. I warn you that if I ever see you inside the State again, I draw on you."

Pacheco scowled but said nothing and went

away, when the Shepherd turned to Judge Brown:

"Our partnership closes to-day. How has Little Jane panned out?"

The judge rubbed his hands.

"The stamping mill is set up, thanks to your generosity. Little Jane is quoted at thirty-five to-day."

"Is the ore regular in yield?"

"So regular that I'll take all your stock at forty if you like."

"You mean that?"

"I do. I've got money now. The mine is an actual success."

"Very well, then. I owe you two hundred thousand dollars as your share of the winnings. You can have all that stock at the original price of fifteen. Will that satisfy you?"

"My dear friend, you are foolishly extravagant. I've already offered you forty for it. Next week it will be at sixty-five. We can afford to be generous to each other."

"As you please. I'll assign you the stock at once, for we are all the Little Jane Company, I believe."

"Not now. I've sold half my share at thirty-five, I tell you."

"To whom?"

"To Mr. Carroll, of Fork Ford, and he wants to take the rest."

"Draw up the transfer then. I'm ready to sell all I have to you. Judge, it never rains but it pours."

"I should smile," returned Brown, in a placid way. "I'm going to run for Governor of Colorado, if this thing holds out as it is going."

Ten minutes passed in writing and signing papers, and then the Shepherd rose.

"That settles our business. You were right when you said we should prosper. Good-bye, now. I'm going off to settle my last business in Colorado."

"And what's that?" asked the judge.

"To find Tom Johnson."

"But he's your overseer now," objected the judge. "You can't fight him, you know. It would be undignified. Besides, he's not in Denver."

"He was, yesterday, making his boast that he had whipped me and could do it again."

"I tell you he's not in Denver. I saw him not half an hour ago galloping off on the South Park road, as if the fiend were after him."

"Just what I might have expected. He heard of my acquittal. Very well, then I must follow him. He and I cannot live in Colorado till we have had one last tussle to settle which is best man. Good-bye, judge."

And he went out and walked off to a private lodging which he had not visited since he fled from Denver, where he donned the old cowboy suit wherein he had once played overseer, sent to the livery stable for his sorrel mare, on which he had escaped from the ranchers, and set off on the trail to the South Park, armed to the teeth, search of Tom Johnson.

CHAPTER XXX.

KING OF THE COWBOYS.

MR. JOHNSON APPLEGATE and his cronies were telling stories on the barroom porch, and the lively town of Muleville was unusually quiet for that time of year, when the bummers on the porch heard the well-known shots and yells, announcing the approach of the "cowboys on a tear," and Mr. Thomas Johnson rode into the town, with a dozen men at his heels, all fighting drunk, and firing their pistols round them in the promiscuous manner they affected at such times.

Muleville, prudent as ever, heard the racket, and dived into her cellars; so that when Mr. Johnson arrived, he was greeted with empty streets and a quiet bar-room, of which he took possession in triumph.

The cowboys rushed for the bottles behind the bar, and spread themselves out on the seats.

"Halifax!" exclaimed one of them in a tone of disappointment. "I thought that'd be a muss. Muleville's gittin' as meek as Moses. Hyar's to the cowboys, fellers. Drink hearty."

There was no need to tell them that, for they were all drunk except Tom Johnson, who had made less noise than any, though he was the leader, and who was now quietly engaged in reloading his pistols, of which he had four.

"Don't you be afraid you won't hev no muss, Bill Spreen," he said rather grimly to the cowboy who had just spoken. "You ain't been hyar as often es I hev. Muleville lays low sometimes, and when she comes, she comes spiteful. Git your weepins loaded for I reckin we ain't through this racket yet."

As if to emphasize his words a crack was heard outside, and a bullet came crashing through the glass window striking Bill Spreen in the shoulder and causing the whole party to jump up, when Tom shouted:

"Go fur 'em, boys. The fun's begun. Git to yer critters."

Out they rushed to their horses to be greeted by a lively fusillade from the other end of the street, and the cowboys charged it recklessly, so that they scattered their opponents like chaff, sending them back into the cellars from whence

they had come, but receiving more than one wound in the operation.

They were turning round to repeat the charge, wild with enthusiasm when they heard a faint distant yell and saw a cloud of dust coming toward them from the plain outside which speedily developed itself into a troop of at least fifty of their own kind, coming at a gallop.

"Hooray!" yelled Bill Spreen, "hyar come the boys. Now we've got 'em. Charge in and clean out Muleville."

They answered the yell of the advancing troop with another and scattered into a long irregular line to meet them, waving their hats and calling to their supposed friends to come on, to which the others replied by similar signals.

Tom Johnson himself, carried away by his excitement rode on with the rest, and bolted right into the middle of a crowd of cowboys from the Queen's Ranch and Fork Ford, headed by Bill Travers and the Gentle Shepherd, who in a single moment had downed the drunken men from their horses with a skill acquired by long practice, all save Tom, who managed to wheel his horse and tore away for his life, believing that the whole posse was after him to kill him.

"Take their weapons and follow," cried the Shepherd. "Not a shot, mind. We are not on a tear now."

He dashed on, the sorrel mare swiftly overhauling Tom Johnson, who turned in his saddle and fired back, the Shepherd dodging from side to side in his saddle, but not returning a single shot.

As he rode, he sheered off, so as to cut off the way to the village, and Tom, nowise anxious to go in there, made for the open plain, the Gentle Shepherd following.

Thus it resulted that inside of five minutes from the time the race commenced the Shepherd was galloping abreast of the black broncho, at some fifty yards off, Tom still firing but with such a bad aim, owing to his nervous excitement and the yells of the other cowboys that he failed to hit the Shepherd though the little man's clothes were torn in several places by bullets.

Then all of a sudden the Gentle Shepherd pointed his right hand at the flying borsman.

There was a flash and report, and the black broncho pitched over on his head, sending Tom flying.

Before he could recover, two long lariats were on his body, and the Shepherd leaped from his horse, ran to the fallen man and jerked his pistols away before Tom could realize where he was.

He threw the weapons to his men one after the other, and gave the order to them:

"Let him loose. I don't want to kill him or even wound him."

He remounted his own horse and Tom Johnson, bewildered, scrambled to his feet, feeling for his pistols and finding them gone.

Then Arthur called out:

"Listen to me, Tom Johnson. I don't want to kill you, or I could have done it ten times over, as you know. You have been going around this country boasting that you whipped me till I begged, two years ago. Now I ask you, do you take that back?"

Tom looked up savagely.

"Gawl darn you, ye wouldn't ax me that if we stood alone on this plain. You've got a crowd and I'm alone, that's what's the matter. You've got the drop on me and I pass—that's all."

The Shepherd listened to him with a peculiar smile.

"Is that the way you put it? Then I suppose you mean you can whip me still, single-handed?"

"Yes, I kin," cried Tom, still more savagely, in his desperation. "I whipped ye once, and I kin do it again, man to man."

"Very well," said the Shepherd, coolly. "Dare you come to Muleville and try it again in the same place you did two years ago?"

Tom looked over at Muleville in a hesitating way, growling:

"I wouldn't get no show thar. I'm alone and you've got the crowd with ye or ye wouldn't sass me."

"Very well again," cried the Shepherd. "Boys, who'll give his word to see fair play for Tom Johnson?"

"I will!" cried Bill Travers.

"And I!" "And I!" shouted the rest.

"Fight or take water, Tom," Bill Travers added. "You've got to do it, or this hyar man's King of the Cowboys."

"And will ye promise fa'r play?" the cowboy asked wonderingly.

"Yes," said the Shepherd, emphatically. "The question must be settled at once. How will you fight?"

"With quirks, by gum!" said Tom, grinding his teeth. "We'll see who's got the grit. Ye kin outshoot me, but I'll git yer word this day, and you'll see whether or no Tom Johnson's King of the Cowboys."

"Who'll lend him a horse?" asked the Shepherd, and a dozen cowboys were out of the saddle in a moment.

Tom took the nearest horse, and the whole party rode into Muleville at a funeral pace, Bill Travers trotting ahead to spread the news of what was coming.

As a consequence, Muleville was out in force in front of the hotel of Joab Appleby, shouting for the Gentle Shepherd and Tom Johnson alternately, for the nature of the duel rendered the result a doubtful one.

Muleville believed in the Gentle Shepherd as a pistol-shot, but Muleville was not prepared to say that sixty pounds of bone and muscle could be overcome by skill in a contest wherein brute force generally carried the day.

The Gentle Shepherd, after all his hard training, weighed only a hundred and fifty pounds, while Tom Johnson tipped the beam at two hundred and ten, good solid weight.

And Tom looked like a giant when he came out at last stripped to the waist, his black beard bristling with a sardonic smile, his black eyes gleaming with devilish malice, as he drew the long, quirt lash through his left hand and eyed his pigmy foe. Arthur, on the other hand, was very pale, and his face wore a look of watchful anxiety, while the old scars that still seamed his white body caused Tom to growl:

"See the mark of the King of the Cowboys. There's the man I whipped and I'm goin' to do it again till he begs. Hyar's for ye!"

As he spoke he flirted out the long lash for Arthur's face with a dexterity that showed him a master of the weapon, and nearly succeeded, the little man only saving himself by a leap to one side.

Then the duel began in earnest, Tom sending his lashes with a cool precision very different from any thing that Bill Travers had ever shown, each stroke coming straight for Arthur's eyes, the big man driving the little one back and round in a circle, Tom keeping up a flow of taunts all the while, Arthur perfectly silent and on the defensive all the while.

Suddenly the giant, thinking the other so much his inferior that he could risk a false move to get in a blow that would end the battle, drew back his arm for one, instead of flirting out the lash.

In that instant the battle was decided.

Arthur had been trusting to evasions of head and body rather than parries for his defense and had his hand out behind him already.

Both blows sped straight as bullets, but the lash of the Gentle Shepherd struck first full in Tom's face, taking him full between the eyes and blinding him, while his own lash grazed the neck of Arthur, sending the blood out in a spurt.

The next moment Tom Johnson put up his hand to his eyes confusedly, staggered and blindly flourished his whip, while Arthur discharged a terrible two-handed blow that sounded like a pistol-shot and curled round the giant's body like a bloody snake, in a track of gore, eliciting a howl of pain and impotent fury.

Then the tables were turned.

In a single mistake, Tom's science had vanished and he raged around like a blinded bull seeking for his foe, while the Shepherd sent in blow after blow, each taking out the skin where it struck, till even the cowboys turned pale at the terrible punishment the bully was receiving.

At last Tom Johnson stopped and threw up both arms wildly, roaring:

"Enough! Enough! My God, do you want to kill me?"

"Did you ever make me beg?" cried the high sharp voice of the Shepherd. "Own up whipped and beg or I'll treat you as you treated me. Do you beg for mercy?"

"Yes, yes," roared Tom, as another cut curled round him. "I beg, I beg! My God, don't ye hear me?"

"Then who is king of the cowboys?" cried the little man, cracking his whip again near Tom's ears.

"You are, you are," yelled the bully, now thoroughly cowed.

"Then down on your knees and beg my pardon or I'll flog you till you do it. Quick!"

Another lash and Tom went down on his knees, yelling:

"My God! I beg, I beg. Kin a man do more? You're the best man I ever seen. I'm whipped, I'm whipped. For God's sake don't give me no more, Shepherd, I beg."

"Very well," said the victor, sternly. "Now lis'en to me, and try to clear the blood out of your eyes."

Tom took the handkerchief thrown to him, and did as he was bid, while the king of the cowboys went on:

"I've bought the Ten League Ranch, and Pacheco has left Colorado. If I appoint you my overseer, will you promise to take the temperance pledge and never engage in another fight without my permission?"

"I'll promise anything," said Tom, in a broken voice. "I ain't no good no more, Shepherd. Ef you'd do me the favor to blow out my brains I'd take it kindly."

The Shepherd laid his hand on the shoulder of the beaten man, saying:

"Tom Johnson, two years ago I was worse off than you, but I lived it down. Do the same, and I'll help you. I'm going to test your cour-

age now. Dare you give me your hand and say you bear no malice?"

To the utter amazement of the cowboys, Tom burst out sobbing:

"Malice! No; I deserved it all. You've served me rightly, and I'll stick by ye so long as I live."

And so broke down in a tempest of sobs and tears in his utter and public humiliation.

A low hiss went up from the cowboys, and a voice called out from the rear of the ring:

"By gum! Snivelin' like a gal. Who'd ever have thought to see Tom Johnson show the white feather?"

The Gentle Shepherd faced round, his eyes blazing, and called out:

"Who said that? Let him come here and repeat it if he dare."

There was a dead silence, and every man in the circle shrank back.

The Shepherd shook his whip at the direction in which the voice had come.

"The man that said Tom Johnson has showed the white feather lies, and, if he dares face me, I'll try if he has the pluck of Tom Johnson. From this time forward Tom Johnson is my friend as well as overseer, and the man that insults him insults me. He is braver to-day in his humiliation than the man who insults him from behind other people's backs. Am I right, Bill Travers, or not?"

"You're right all the time, Shepherd," said the giant, gravely. "Tom's a good man yet, and don't none of you fellers forget it when he gits well. Come, Tom."

And he helped the beaten man into the house, intending to see to his hurts, but Tom gently repulsed him as he got to the door and turned round o' the crowd.

"Boys," he said, "I've got a few words to say. Will ye hear 'em?"

A curious silence fell on the crowd and Tom continued:

"I want every man to understand that I b'ar no malice. I've b'en whipped fa'r, at my own weepins, and the Shepherd's got my word. Two year ago I sot on him and I treated him cruel; but he wouldn't beg. I want to say, before ye all, that I lied when I said he did. He war a sick man a hundred pound less than me, and he wouldn't beg if he died. He foun' as well as he then know'd how, but he wouldn't beg. I've been afeared of him ever since, fur I've see'd that comin' which has come to-day. When I'm whipped, I stay so, and I'm whipped at las? Now I want to ax ye all a favor. Will ye do it, boys, or not?"

"What is it, Tom?" asked several.

"Will ye do it, if I tell ye?" queried the giant wiping the blood from his eyes.

"Yes," "Yes," cried several.

"Then take off your hats," shouted Tom in a voice of thunder, "and give three cheers fur the best man in the State of Colorado, Parson Jim, King of the Cowboys."

And the shout that went up was tremendous for all Muleville roared, "Hurrah! HURRAH!! HURRAH!!!"

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